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Through the Revolving Door: From Greenpeace to Big Business

by Dr. Sharon Beder

The revolving door that operates between industry, government and public relations firms has been well documented. A similar revolving door between journalism and corporate PR helps grease a smoothly-operating propaganda system in which both corporations and their supposed watchdogs are in fact drinking buddies and business partners.

Now Greenpeace, one of the world's leading environmental organizations and a frequent adversary of corporate polluters, is itself a site of the ubiquitous revolving door. Not only are people like former economist Thilo Bode moving from industry to Greenpeace, but individuals like Paul Gilding, the former CEO of Greenpeace International, are finding career opportunities as industry consultants when they leave.

Gilding's career with Greenpeace began in the late 1980s. He was hired by Greenpeace Australia in 1989 and within six months was appointed its executive director. It was under Gilding that Greenpeace first became involved in Sydney's "green" Olympics. (See my stories in the Second Quarter 1999 *PR Watch* and on page 7 of this issue.) In 1993 Gilding became executive director of Greenpeace International

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Flack Attack

PR Watch has never shied away from controversy, and our second quarter 1999 issue was no exception. It drew strong criticism from three individuals who have been involved in next year's "Green Olympics" in Australia and who took exception to Sharon Beder's critique of the role that Greenpeace has played in promoting the Olympics as an environmental showcase. Their letters appear on pages 5 and 6 of this issue.

Beder in turn replied with a new article, titled "From Green Warriors to Greenwashers" (beginning on page 8) and with the critique of former Greenpeace International CEO Paul Gilding that appears as this issue's cover story.

Given the sharp-tongued nature of this exchange, it is important to point out that both Beder and Greenpeace have a long track record of activism in defense of the environment. The issues at stake in this debate are serious and deserve careful scrutiny.

As *PR Watch* has often revealed, the environmental movement is suffering under a two-pronged attack from chemical, genetic engineering, mining and other interests threatened by environmental reform. On the one hand, a "bad cop" approach is used to create and subsidize anti-environmental attack dogs, from the self-named "wise use" movement of Ron Arnold to "sound science" front groups like Elizabeth Whelan's American Council on Science and Health. These industry-funded groups paint themselves as voices of reason and moderation in contrast to the "terrorism" of environmental extremists and fearmongers.

This "bad cop" assault puts environmentalists on the defensive, while industry's "good cop" tactics attempt to re-define environmentalism in terms acceptable to global capitalism. Companies want to appear green and socially responsible, so they use their PR experts to form "partnerships" with environmentalists to produce "win-win solutions" that claim to resolve

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but was pushed out of that position 18 months later due to internal disputes, including disagreements over his belief in “solutions-oriented” corporate collaborations. However, he remains a member of the Greenpeace Australia General Assembly, a select group of 37 people who elect the Greenpeace Australia board of directors.

In 1995, Gilding started his own private consultancy called the Ecos Corporation, of which he is now chairman. Ecos literature says it offers “strategic support and advice to corporate clients and partners seeking commercial advantage through a focus on sustainability. . . . Our clients are primarily large corporations in the finance, energy, chemical and resource sectors.”

Past and present clients of Ecos include:

- Monsanto, used as a case study in the *Greenpeace Book of Greenwash* and currently warring with Greenpeace in the US and Europe over its genetic engineering of the world food supply.
- DuPont, a multinational chemical company that has been targeted by Greenpeace and other environmental groups for its environmental misdeeds.
- Placer Dome, a Canadian-based gold mining company which owns half the controversial Porgera gold mine in Papua New Guinea. The Porgera mine has caused as much if not more environmental destruction than BHP’s Ok Tedi mine, according to the Minerals Policy Institute, an Australian watchdog group.
- Suncor/SPP of Canada/Australia, discussed in my accompanying story on page 7 of this issue.
- BP Australia, a multinational oil company.

- WMC Ltd. (formerly Western Mining Corporation), a mining company whose uranium and other mining activities are cited as a case study in greenwashing by the Minerals Policy Institute, which criticizes WMC for chemical dumping, deforestation and human rights impacts on indigenous people.

SUSTAINABLE RHETORIC

According to the *Australian Financial Review*, Ecos earned about \$650,000 in its 1997–98 fiscal year. “We are there to service the interests of our clients,” Gilding said. “We are there because we seek to improve the profitability of the people we are working for, so we’re very clear as to whom we’re aligned with. We’re saying we can increase your profitability by focusing on sustainability.”

Ecos defines sustainability as “society’s expectation that business adds economic, social and environmental value from its operations,” according to former Ecos director Mark Lyster. This is very different definition from the usual ones about the needs of future generations and maintaining environmental quality.

“The degree to which a company is viewed as being a positive or negative participant in solving sustainability issues will determine, to a very great degree, their long term business viability,” observes Ben Woodhouse. At the time he made this statement, Woodhouse was director of global environmental issues at Dow Chemical. After 31 years with Dow, he retired and joined up with Gilding as CEO of Ecos.

Woodhouse also worked with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), an international corporate lobbying organization set up in

FLACK ATTACK *(continued from page one)*

conflicts. For the parties involved, the “win-win” might be real in a bottom-line dollars and cents way: companies use their newly greened image to sell more cars or hamburgers or genetically engineered corn or Olympic advertising; big environmental groups tout major reforms in their fundraising letters and proposals to the Pew Charitable Trusts and others that reward such deals.

Re-read Sharon Beder’s articles in the previous PR Watch, the letters in this issue, and her response and decide for yourself the reality behind the Summer 2000 Olympics: Are they a green victory or greenwashing?

Beder’s related cover story suggests that one reason why environmental groups are being co-opted is that many of their former leaders are finding “greener” pas-

tures as corporate environmental consultants. Most environmental activists are unpaid volunteers. Those that are employed by environmental groups, with a few exceptions, earn much less than they could working for big business. However, some green leaders have found that they can profit handsomely in the corporate world by trading on their knowledge, connections and environmentalist reputations.

As this century closes the green movement is definitely floundering, not because public support is lacking or ecological crises are solved, but because corporations have learned how to tame and turn aside fundamental environmental reforms. As Mark Dowie argued in his 1995 book, *Losing Ground*, the green movement needs to examine and criticize itself, or it will become merely a clever marketing hook and even less relevant to the problems we face in the 21st century.

1990 in the lead up to the United Nation's 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil. "With the able assistance of public relations giant Burson-Marsteller, a very elite group of business people (including Burson-Marsteller itself) was seemingly able to plan the agenda for the Earth Summit with little interference from NGOs or government leaders," observes Joyce Nelson, author of *Sultans of Sleaze*. Its members include the CEOs of Dow, DuPont, Shell, Mitsubishi, Browning-Ferris Industries and many more.

Woodhouse received special thanks in the acknowledgments of WBCSD's 1997 report, "Environmental Performance and Shareholder Value," which promoted the idea that investors were more likely to invest in companies they believed had a good environmental record. Following its lead, Ecos has undertaken a survey of the top 150 companies on the Australian Stock Exchange in order to develop a portfolio of 50 "green" companies.

The companies chosen by Ecos as "environmental leaders" included mining companies with poor environmental reputations such as Western Mining Corporation and Placer Dome (both Ecos clients) and Rio Tinto. When questioned about these choices, Gilding said that they were not chosen because they were "green" but because they had undertaken some environmental initiative that was likely to have financial benefits. This misleading definition of the term "environmental leaders" is not mentioned on Ecos web pages where this survey is described.

The share price performance of this supposedly "green" portfolio in the years 1992-98 was tested

against the Australian All Ordinaries Index and found to outperform ordinary shares by 4 percent. All this is supposed to confirm the Ecos philosophy that "sustainability" can be a key business "driver."

But how real are the improvements in environmental performance? To what extent is shareholder value being added through imagery rather than substance? One clue comes from the résumés of the eight people who currently work for Ecos. Rather than environmental scientists and engineers, its staff consists of financial, PR and communications specialists. They are:

- Ben Woodhouse, CEO and former vice-president and global director of issues management, crisis management and Industry Affairs for Dow Chemical.
- Blair Palese, former head of public relations for the Body Shop International and currently director, Greenpeace International Olympics Campaign. (See her letter to the editor, page 5 of this issue.)
- Alan Tate, a TV news reporter before joining Ecos, which describes him in PR hyperbole as "one of Australia's pre-eminent experts in the full range of business, political and scientific aspects of climate change."
- Sheena Boughen, whose apparent expertise is in developing individual and organizational relationships.
- Cath Bremner, a business analyst.
- Carolyn Butt, Gilding's personal assistant.
- Kim Grosvenor, whose experience is in finance.

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THOSE WHO CAN'T DO, CONSULT

Gilding argues that Ecos staff members are strategy consultants rather than technical consultants. They can't design an environmental management program, but they can help companies to see the risks and opportunities created by environmental issues. They "advise companies what they need to do differently to secure their long-term commercial future in the context of sustainability changes."

One role that Ecos plays is to help companies produce environmental reports. Gilding stresses that this is within an overall program of change. Ecos helped Placer Dome, the Canadian gold mining company, "produce the world's first mining company sustainability report outlining their economic, social and environmental performance." Ecos also worked with Placer to develop "new approaches to stakeholder engagement at operations in Australia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea."

Woodhouse advised WMC on its 1997 environmental report which was featured in the Mineral Policies Institute's publication titled "Glossy Reports, Grim Reality." The MPI documented environmental damage caused by WMC operations; campaigns by WMC to oppose environmental legislation in Australia, the Philippines and North America; and a campaign to oppose legally binding greenhouse reduction targets in the lead up to the Kyoto conference on global warming.

The Queensland Timber Board hired Ecos after years of fighting against environmentalists had undermined the Board's public credibility. Gilding had no problem with taking up their cause. "Ultimately forest products are inherently sustainable," he explained to *Between the Leaves*, a Queensland government publication. "Therefore the future of the industry lies in embracing environmental issues as a marketing tool."

Gilding's enthusiasm for business solutions to environmental problems goes beyond a tactical response and has become an ideological celebration of corporate values. "Everywhere now the market is supreme, and this is the victory of the capitalist system," he told *The West Australian*, adding, "There has been a breakdown in environmental conflict and the free market is now driving change." In an interview with the radio program *Background Briefing*, he commented that "in many ways the environmental and social communities are still back in a decade ago where they see government as the main force for driving change."

Not surprisingly, Gilding has received various awards from the business community for his work, including an Environmental Leadership Award in 1997 from *Tomorrow Magazine*, an outlet of the WBCSD.

These accolades and the perks of his profitable business no doubt make it easier for Gilding to turn a blind eye when necessary to the failings of his clients. Reporter Jacquelynne Willcox Bailey of *The Weekend Australian* interviewed him about his work with the Mirvac-Lend Lease consortium on its bid to design the Olympic Village. Asked about the village's proximity to a toxic waste treatment plant, Gilding replied that his job had been to help his client win the bid, and that the client hadn't asked him to consider the treatment plant so he didn't.

WHEELS KEEP TURNING

Gilding is only one of several high-profile Greenpeace staffers who have gone on to become industry consultants. Michael Bland, for example, left Greenpeace in 1989 to work for a Sydney-based green marketing firm called Environmental Marketing Services. Bland then started his own consultancy, Environment Matters, before returning to work for Greenpeace in 1993.

The revolving door goes both ways. The current chairperson of Greenpeace Australia, Bob Wilson, was managing director of the Sydney Water Board in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the board was covering up gross contamination of the ocean by toxic waste from its sewage discharges. High levels of organochlorines in fish were kept secret at Water Board request.

Blair Palese left Greenpeace to work as head of public relations for the Body Shop International, a "socially responsible" cosmetics company. She now works for Greenpeace four days a week. On the fifth day she works for Gilding's Ecos Corporation in the area of communications. Palese is comfortable with the fact that Ecos clients are often Greenpeace targets and denies that she has any conflicts of interest.

One example of a conflict between Greenpeace and Ecos is the development of an oil-shale deposit in Queensland which is opposed by Greenpeace because of the fossil fuel emissions associated with it and the damage it could do to the Barrier Reef. The developers—Canadian company Suncor and Australian company Southern Pacific Petroleum (SPP)—are clients of Ecos.

Greenpeace press releases accuse Suncor and SPP of "misleading the public and their own shareholders over the amount of greenhouse pollution" from the planned development and argue that "oil shale is the most polluting source of energy currently being developed" with much higher carbon dioxide emissions than conventional oil sources.

Ecos literature, on the other hand, calls "Suncor one of the leading fossil fuel focused energy companies in the world on climate change." n

Palese Says Beder Was “Outdated, Incorrect and Unworthy”

Letter from Blair Palese, Greenpeace International Olympics Campaign, Sydney, Australia

Your article about Greenpeace’s role in Sydney’s Olympic Games (“Greenwashing an Olympic-Sized Toxic Dump,” Sharon Beder, *Second Quarter*, 1999) was outdated, incorrect and unworthy of your usually insightful publication.

Beder implies, wrongly, that Greenpeace’s involvement in Sydney’s Olympic Games is and has always been motivated by the desire for positive PR and, from that, increased donations. In fact, compared with most of our international campaigns, our Olympics work has received only marginal media attention and certainly brings in no significant funding. This is generally true for all of our solutions work internationally but makes it no less important to our environmental agenda. We were well aware of this going into the Olympics campaign back in 1993.

Sadly, Beder’s article included nothing about Greenpeace’s Olympics campaign since 1995 and she only contacted Greenpeace after its publication, not before to check her facts or investigate the issue.

Beder failed to mention any of the excellent successes and ongoing problems of Sydney’s Olympic Games which Greenpeace has worked on for the last seven years—both of which we talk of equally. Successes include the building of what will be the world’s largest solar suburb where athletes will be housed during the Games, the establishment of the world’s first virtually car-free Olympic Games, and the introduction of whole new product lines in Australia such as PVC-free materials to meet Sydney’s Environmental Guidelines. The establishment of the Guidelines themselves, with input from a number of environmental groups, is unique to Sydney but will likely be part of future Games developments internationally.

Of course there are issues still tarnishing Sydney’s environmental reputation, and Greenpeace is the first to be critical of these. The use of ozone-depleting chemicals in Olympic venues and the cleanup of toxic waste in Homebush Bay, just off the Olympic site, still hang in the balance.

Far from being co-opted by Sydney’s Games organizers, Greenpeace is currently taking legal action against the Olympic Coordination Authority in the Federal Court of Australia over the issue of ozone-depleting HCFCs in the Olympic SuperDome and other venues.

Regarding toxic waste near the Olympic site, no organization has done more than Greenpeace to expose the problem and fight for a real environmental solution. We have carried out numerous protest actions, discovered and secured 70 barrels of dioxin waste left in the area by

multinational Union Carbide and continue to pressure those responsible to begin a cleanup before the Games.

Dr. Darryl Luscombe, a Ph.D. chemist and Greenpeace toxics campaigner, has worked with experts internationally to find and promote the best possible way to treat this waste so that the area is made safe for those living there. Far from hiding from the seriousness of this problem, Greenpeace believes we must seek out real and effective solutions to the disposal of the world’s stockpiles of toxic waste and Sydney, with its upcoming Olympics spotlight, is a good place to start.

The inaccuracies in Beder’s article are too numerous to mention, but there are two in particular that I would like to point out. Firstly, she stated that “the issue of toxic contamination of the site was not openly discussed [by Greenpeace] prior to the Olympic decision.” As one who worked on the campaign in the early days and was in Monte Carlo when Sydney won the bid in 1993, I can state categorically that this is untrue. I spoke to numerous journalists and IOC members about reclaiming toxic land for Sydney’s Games and the environmental and safety risks. Greenpeace believed then and believes now that the Olympics can provide a unique opportunity to bring funds and attention to the toxic waste left there that would otherwise be ignored. We are still campaigning to ensure that promises of cleanup are kept before and after the Games.

Secondly, Beder suggested that having temporary housing in the Athletes’ Village is an environmental shortfall from the original Village plan. In fact, having just visited the site with those building the temporary housing, I can report that they are an innovation to the Australian building industry. They are virtually PVC-free, include Forest Stewardship Council certified timber throughout, and were designed to significantly reduce building waste during construction. These houses will be sold for use offsite after the Games and will positively influence future construction of similar homes nationally.

Will Sydney’s Games be environmentally perfect? Of course not. Does this mean Greenpeace should not try to use the opportunity, billions of dollars spent and global Olympic focus to push for environmental solutions? Of course not, again. Greenpeace works to find any and all ways to protect the environment, not to play it safe or to choose campaigns based on their PR potential. When *PR Watch* is ready to report the complexities of this solutions-oriented campaign, we’d be delighted to work with you. It’s a fascinating story and one that will lead you to conclude that Sydney is not a Potemkin village.

—Blair Palese

OCA Spokesperson Says Beder Was Wrong

Letter from Dr. Kate Hughes, Ecology Programs Director, Special Advisor for Environment to the OCA Director General

Dr. Sharon Beder is highly misled in her negative assessment of the Olympic Coordination Authority's (OCA) Homebush Bay site cleanup and appears uninterested in gaining further knowledge that may provide opportunities to move on to a more informed position.

Dr. Beder has chosen to ignore the significant and beneficial leachate management system designed into the engineering waste mounds that are visible at the OCA site. The system evolved following experience with "tight landfill" which indicated the need for a more practical approach that accepts the reality of landfill leachate. Specifically, the system catches any contaminated water and transfers it to a treatment facility. Treatment at the Sydney Olympic site includes the managed breakdown of pollutants using natural processes (bioremediation).

Dr. Beder has also omitted any mention of OCA's enhanced remediation strategy which is designed to provide a positive and lasting legacy for the nature and human communities in the Sydney Basin and beyond. The legacy is primarily focused on improved protection of air, soil and water quality as well as improved community understanding of these processes. The mechanism for achieving this involves three inter-linked

programs: a geographic information system site history for validation purposes, a biological sciences program to improve the predictability of environmental testing and a community education and development program.

Finally, Dr. Beder's assertion that I am responsible for carefully managed public relations events and that I have been co-opted by the OCA to greenwash the remediation program is just not true. After nearly two decades of campaign and advocacy work on hazardous chemical issues, I moved across to the government sector to do a job for the community. I was happy to do this because after study of the remediation program, I concluded that something really great had been done there, deserving recognition because it showed a new approach to solving land contamination issues.

I share Dr. Beder's concerns about cover-ups but only when they have foundation. I regret that she did not take up an invitation to our second community forum last year nor accept my offer to discuss her published views with our Environment Reference Group. I hope one day she does. As an opinion leader teaching at a university, she has a professional obligation to keep up with facts.

—Kate Hughes

Thorstensen Says Beder Was Bitter

Letter from Lynette Thorstensen, former CEO of Greenpeace Australia

I am very disappointed at the many inaccuracies in the Sharon Beder piece. As CEO of Greenpeace Australia at the time of the announcement of Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 Summer Olympics, I undertook literally hundreds of interviews in which I deliberately raised the issue of the dioxin-contaminated sites within the Olympics precinct.

I remarked again and again that the Olympics process, though far from perfect, would provide the momentum and the capital needed to genuinely remediate the contaminated sites on the Rhodes peninsula.

I was particularly passionate about these issues because, prior to my appointment as CEO, I was the national Coordinator of Greenpeace Australia's Toxics Campaign for four years. In fact, one of our early campaigns was to publicly expose the toxic contamination of Homebush Bay and the Rhodes peninsula to several media outlets as far back as 1990.

Sharon and I worked very well together on a number of toxics issues, and she was hired by Greenpeace to produce a number of reports. Unfortunately, Greenpeace's relationship with Sharon soured considerably when her lover, Richard Gosden, was sacked from Greenpeace. This has influenced Sharon's behavior ever since, and has

meant that she has continued to attack and seriously misrepresent Greenpeace.

Beder has chosen to virtually ignore my many hundreds of hours of media commentary because it does not suit her purposes. I was without question the key Greenpeace spokesperson on the Olympics in 1993 and 1994, yet I am quoted only once in her piece and out of context.

As CEO of Greenpeace Australia, I signed off on all of Greenpeace's official media statements, yet Beder chooses instead to concentrate on Karla Bell, Robert Cartmel and Paul Gilding.

I'm afraid I don't make great copy for Sharon's theories. I'm not an evil consultant of some sort. No, I'm a humble stay-at-home mother these days, volunteering one day a week for the Wilderness Society. I consider myself a committed environmentalist. It is for this reason that I am offended at Sharon's many exaggerations, half-truths and attacks on hard-working activists. What is completely unforgivable, though, is that Sharon's unethical attack on a leading green organization hinders the cause of environmental protection.

This is exactly the kind of highly misleading "shit piece"—as we call them in this country—that should not appear in your publication!

—Lynette Thorstensen

Facts vs. Factoids: Sharon Beder Responds

by Dr. Sharon Beder

Neither Thorstensen nor Palese has challenged the central point of my original article, namely that the Sydney Olympic Games are sited on a toxic waste dump that hasn't been cleaned up properly, and that to call them "the Green Games" is an exercise in greenwashing. My article was about how Sydney won the bid to host the Games by promoting them as "green." I argued that the Olympic bidders were only able to present the Games as "green" because Greenpeace supported the bid by also promoting the Games as "green."

Palese and Thorstensen do not take issue with any of this. They do not argue that I exaggerated the contamination of the Olympic site or that the site has been properly cleaned up. They do not dispute that Greenpeace endorsed the bid as "green" or claim that Greenpeace was unaware of the contamination. The fact that Greenpeace is now campaigning against the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA) for its betrayal of environmental promises merely demonstrates my point that those promises represented greenwashing aimed at winning the Games rather than genuine environmental commitment.

As for Hughes, her response is at odds with the criticisms that Greenpeace Australia has belatedly made of the toxic cleanup at the Olympic site. Is she suggesting that toxic waste dumps can be cleaned up with bulldozers and a few leachate drains? Add some ecology programs as an afterthought and you have a "lasting legacy for nature and human communities"! This may be "a new approach to solving land contamination issues" from a PR perspective but it certainly does not solve the real problem of the unpredictable migration of toxic waste.

Far from being outdated and incorrect, the situation described in my article is still current. The toxic waste is still buried on site, and the Games are still being described by the OCA and by Greenpeace as "green." No amount of solar panels and PVC-free materials or even protest actions by Greenpeace will change that.

Palese and Thorstensen accuse me of numerous "inaccuracies," but fail to offer specifics. Palese's first point suggests that she was candid about the toxic waste issue with "numerous journalists" before the Olympic bid was decided. If so, why did none of those journalists report her comments at the time? What exactly did she tell them?

Thorstensen makes a similar point regarding her own media interviews in connection with Greenpeace campaigns to expose "toxic contamination of Homebush Bay and the Rhodes Peninsula." Readers should understand, however, that she is not referring to the Olympic site itself but rather to other contaminated sites in the neighborhood, the Rhodes Peninsula being kilometers away.

Palese falsely claims that I only contacted Greenpeace after my article was published. In fact, I interviewed two Greenpeace campaigners as part of my earlier research for that article, namely Karla Bell (then Greenpeace Olympics campaigner) and Robert Cartmel (then Greenpeace toxics campaigner).

Thorstensen stoops to a classic PR ploy—the personal attack—when she claims that I am motivated to attack Greenpeace under the influence of an embittered "lover, Richard Gosden, [who] was sacked from Greenpeace." This invention is a clever mixture of half-truths and scrambled chronology.

The truth is that I have been married to Richard Gosden since 1986. He worked briefly for Greenpeace in 1989 but felt unsuited to the corporate culture of Greenpeace and resigned after six months. A couple of months later, he was enticed to work for them again as a consultant to help get a clean waters campaign off the ground. He has had no involvement with them since, holds no grudge, and seems to have amicable relations with the Greenpeace people he occasionally encounters. Thorstensen doesn't know him, since she only began her employment at Greenpeace after he had left.

I did write a couple of reports for Greenpeace in 1990 and 1992, but these were both done after Richard Gosden's last involvement with Greenpeace. The fact that this was subsequent to his employment at Greenpeace and that I got along well with Thorstensen then (as she herself states) is proof that his experience had no adverse effect on me. My critical perspective is not based on some old grudge but rather on my research into the greenwashing of the Sydney Olympics and Greenpeace's evolving role as a pawn in the game of corporate PR.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of their response, however, is not an issue of fact but what they *think* I am saying. Palese accuses me of implying that Greenpeace's involvement in the Olympic Games is motivated by a desire for positive PR and increased donations. While Greenpeace may fear that people will draw that conclusion, I never made that argument. To the contrary, I have always been doubtful that labeling the Games as "green" would help Greenpeace to attract donations.

Opportunism may be part of the explanation for Greenpeace's role in the Olympics, but the real issue raised by my article has to do with fundamental strategy for the environmental movement. Like many groups, Greenpeace is at a crossroads. Will it remain a principled "green warrior," or will it become a deal-making, compromised collaborator with the powers that be? That question is the focus of my story beginning on page 8 of this issue. n

From Green Warriors to Greenwashers

by Dr. Sharon Beder

When Greenpeace emerged as an international organization in the 1970s, it embodied a spirit of courageous protest by activists who were willing to place their bodies on the line to call attention to environmental injustice. Its mission was to “bear witness” to environmental abuses and take direct nonviolent action to prevent them.

In the 1990s, however, a new current of thought emerged, both at the international level and at the level of national affiliates such as Greenpeace Australia. Greenpeace leaders and many members began to talk of going beyond negative criticism. The Greenpeace Australia website proudly asserts this new philosophy: “We work with industry and government to find solutions.”

This approach carries an obvious emotional and intellectual appeal, but it also carries dangers. Greenpeace continues its traditional work of exposing some of the worst instances of environmental degradation, but its new focus on “solutions” can undermine that work. Its activists are often committed and genuinely concerned to save the environment, but are caught in the contradiction between “bearing witness” and the compromises that arise in the process of seeking solutions.

The philosophy that Greenpeace espouses today contrasts markedly with positions that it took in the early 1990s, when “green marketing” first emerged as part of a strategy that the PR industry calls “cause-related marketing.” A series of media reports and books, such as *The Green Consumer Guide* by John Elkington and Julia Hales, gave the impression that the environment could be saved if individuals changed their shopping habits and bought environmentally sound products. There was a surge of advertisements claiming environmental benefits, and green imagery became a symbol used to sell products.

When green marketing first emerged, it came under criticism from a number of Greenpeace campaigners. Paul Gilding, then head of Greenpeace Australia, described it as a strategy of “Bung a dolphin on the label and we’ll be right.” *Greenpeace Magazine* asked rhetorically whether people should buy recycled paper from a company that pollutes rivers with pulp mill effluent.

“It’s not that all these ads are untrue,” observed Peter Dykstra, then media director of Greenpeace USA. The problem, he said, is that “they depict 5 percent of environmental virtue to mask the 95 percent of environmental vice.” Juliet Kellner called this the “bit-less-bad” trap, where green claims for one aspect of a product belie other aspects of the product or company policies.

Yet this is just what Greenpeace has done for the Olympic games scheduled to be held in Sydney, Australia in the year 2000. They have not only allowed the organizers to “bung a dolphin on the label,” but they have

helped market environmental virtues of the Games while ignoring some key environmental vices. In particular, as I pointed out in my previous article (*PR Watch* vol. 6, no. 2), they helped sell the concept of the Green Olympics to the International Olympics Committee without alerting it to the extent of the toxic waste problem.

LANDFILL LOVERS

In recent years, Greenpeace has staged protests to highlight the toxic waste on land surrounding the Olympic site. It has also campaigned and initiated legal action against some decisions of the Olympic Coordination Authority (OCA) which breached the environmental guidelines that Greenpeace helped write.

Even today, however, Greenpeace continues to promote the Games as “green.” The Greenpeace web site (<http://www.greenpeace.org/Olympics/summary.htm>) states that “the Olympic site itself has been made safe.” A June 1999 Greenpeace brochure states that “Sydney authorities were thorough in their efforts to remediate before construction began. Most of the waste remains on site, in state-of-the-art landfills, covered with clay, vegetated to blend in with the Olympic site.”

These statements contrast with Greenpeace’s past history of campaigning against the use of landfills to dispose of toxic waste, particularly when the waste includes dioxin, organochlorines and heavy metals. Greenpeace has campaigned against this in the past because it is impossible to prevent these toxic materials from leaking into underlying groundwater. The major landfills on the Olympic site contain these sorts of wastes without even linings to mitigate the flow of leachate through the underlying soil. When I questioned Greenpeace’s current Olympic campaigners, they seemed unaware of the absence of liners, which makes me wonder what basis they have for labeling the landfills “state of the art.”

In its own literature, Greenpeace Australia still states that “landfills eventually leak pollution into the surrounding environment” and makes it clear that this is not a suitable disposal method for waste near the Olympic site. Yet, as part of its green marketing role, Greenpeace Australia has turned round and stated categorically that an unlined landfill on the Olympic site is “safe.”

Darryl Luscombe, Toxics Campaigner for Greenpeace Australia, wrote in a 1997 letter to the editor that Greenpeace has long advocated the closure of Castlereagh, a landfill facility on the outskirts of suburban Sydney that leaked despite being chosen for its impermeable clay soil (unlike the more permeable soils at the Olympic site). When asked what he thought of the landfills on the Olympic site, he opined that the biggest issue was what was going to happen to the waste after-

wards. The landfills should only be a temporary solution, he argued, since “tens of thousands of liters” of material was leaching out of them. He admitted there was “no guarantee” that the government would do anything more once the Olympic Coordination Authority ceases to exist, and the government had made no commitments to do any further remediation after the games.

“The site is safer than it was,” Luscombe said when asked if it was realistic to expect that any further cleanup would occur on site after the Games. Previously the area was a toxic waste dump, he explained, but “now there is a toxic waste dump that is more highly managed.”

According to Blair Palese, participation in the “green Games” was an opportunity for Greenpeace “to push for environmental solutions.” In reality, however, the most likely legacy of the year 2000 Olympic Games will be the notion that landfilling toxic waste is an acceptable way to deal with it. By endorsing this “solution,” Greenpeace has provided an excuse for other waste-generating industries to continue with business as usual. Its public acceptance of the “remediation” process on the Olympic site, and its active promotion of the Olympics as green, has been interpreted as an endorsement of landfills as a safe way to dispose of toxic waste. Greenpeace has helped turn the site and its surroundings into highly desirable real estate. They are now suggesting this can be done elsewhere.

Sydney’s example has not been lost on other potential host cities for future Olympic Games. Toronto is bidding for the 2008 Games and has formed an Environmental Committee in an effort to put together a “green” bid. Luscombe traveled to Toronto to attend this committee’s first meeting. Toronto has even copied the idea of siting the Olympic athlete’s village on a former industrial contaminated site. The land was originally going to be the site of low-income housing but the remediation would have cost too much. Now the Sydney Olympic example has shown how the cleanup can be done on the cheap. The added bonus for the Toronto bidders is that if they turn the village over to low income housing afterwards, they might get endorsements from social justice groups that opposed Toronto’s bid in 1996.

And don’t think the Olympic precedent is being lost on developers in other parts of Australia. The greenwashing in this case suits not only the Olympic organizers, but also manufacturers who generate toxic wastes, those who bury them, and developers who seek to profit from the land on which these toxic wastes have been buried. A whole polluting industry that Greenpeace has been trying to phase out has now been given a PR boost by Greenpeace Australia.

GRADING CURVES

The landfills are not the only problem associated with the Olympic site, as Greenpeace itself acknowledges. In a “Special Olympic Report” issued in September 1998, Greenpeace included an “environmental report card” that gave the project mixed marks. The Olympic site’s air-conditioning system received a grade of “F” for using chemicals that attack earth’s ozone layer and contribute to global warming—a decision that the Greenpeace brochure describes as “promises betrayed.” The “report card” also gives an “F” grade to toxic remediation of land near the Olympic site and the bay.

Current Greenpeace literature on the “Green Games” is full of praise for the solar design of the athletes’ village and other environmental virtues. It says nothing whatsoever, however, about the dangers posed by the Lidcombe Liquid Waste Plant (LWP), which is located between the Olympic sporting facilities and the athlete’s village. This omission is particularly noteworthy since the proximity of the athletes’ village to the LWP was known to Greenpeace when it offered its design for the village. A year before Greenpeace issued its “Special Olympic Report,” in fact, Greenpeace’s Darryl Luscombe made a 1997 submission to the government in which he argued that the plant “should be phased out as a matter of priority.”

Concerns raised in Luscombe’s submission included “health and safety issues associated with the close proximity (240 meters) of the LWP to existing or proposed residential areas (e.g. Newington/Olympic village)” and its “potential to contribute significant adverse effects on the area during major public events such as the Olympics.” He noted “complaints from nearby residents regarding noxious odors and VOC emissions,” and warned, “A facility that emits toxic, carcinogenic, persistent and bioaccumulative compounds to the environment, particularly within 250 meters of residential housing, clearly contradicts all of the principles of sound urban planning and environmental responsibility.”

Greenpeace Olympics Campaign International Coordinator Blair Palese cites the Olympics Report Card as evidence of Greenpeace’s integrity and independence, noting that the report card gives failing marks in several areas to the Olympic Coordination Authority. She sees nothing wrong, however, with continuing to endorse the games as green. “Greenpeace doesn’t believe anything is perfect,” she said, “We don’t believe demanding absolute success in advance makes sense.”

“You can’t promote these as the green Games on the world stage while at the same time allowing the use of HCFCs in the cooling system of one of the main venues,

especially when there are alternatives such as ammonia," said Greenpeace Olympics campaigner Michael Bland in an interview with *New Scientist* magazine. Yet this is just what Greenpeace is doing, despite its report card.

Nor is this shift in direction confined to the Australian branch. Greenpeace International has written to Olympic sponsors, including BHP, Coca-Cola, General Motors-Holden, McDonalds and others, inviting them to use the "Green Games" to enhance their own environmental images: "As sponsors, you have the opportunity to play a key role in this success. One of the many benefits of being part of the Green Games is the chance to demonstrate your company's commitment to the environment and to future generations. The Sydney Olympics offer your staff the opportunity to take part in a long-term global initiative to protect the world's environment. . . . Greenpeace would like to work with you to explore the areas in which you can make an environmental contribution during the Sydney 2000 Games."

To take just one example from the companies on this list, BHP was named one of the worst 10 corporations in 1995 by *Multinational Monitor* for polluting the Ok Tedi River in Papua New Guinea. According to the *Monitor*, the pollution amounted to a "daily dose of more than 80,000 tons of toxic mining waste." In 1996, BHP settled a legal battle over its pollution by agreeing to pay local landowners more than \$300 million. At the Olympics, however, it will get to "demonstrate its commitment to the environment" by supporting energy conservation or the use of environmentally-safe refrigerants.

Greenpeace Australia has done a similar service for Nike, a company much in need of good PR following media coverage of working conditions in sweatshops that produce Nike shoes in third world countries. In its 1998 Olympic Report, Greenpeace congratulates Nike for promising to phase out PVC in its products, making "PVC free sportswear available to athletes and consumers." The report features a picture of Greenpeace presenting a Nike representative with a cake in the shape of a green Nike shoe, complete with trademark swoosh.

A SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED APPROACH

Although it would be an oversimplification to say that Greenpeace's change in direction was prompted purely by PR and financial concerns, the change occurred in the early 1990s, while Greenpeace was in the process of organizational soul-searching as its membership began to decline after the boom years of 1989-1992. The number of paying supporters worldwide fell from 4.8 million in 1990 to 3.1 million in 1995. The loss was particularly pronounced in the US, Canada, Sweden, New Zealand, Denmark, the Netherlands and Australia. In

Nike Goes PVC Free

The Environmental Guidelines, which aim to minimise and ideally eliminate the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) on the Olympic site have been adhered to in much of the construction. Now athletes can join the PVC phase-out. A recent decision by sporting manufacturer, Nike to eliminate the use of PVC in its products and facilities, should make PVC free sportswear available to athletes and consumers.

Greenpeace welcomes the Nike move as another step in the green for the last plastic and calls on all sportsman companies to just do it and follow Nike's lead in phasing out PVC. In particular Greenpeace calls on Olympic sponsors to end their use of PVC, as recommended by the Olympic Green Guidelines.

The manufacture of PVC involves the production and release of hazardous chemicals, including dioxins — the most toxic chemical produced by humans. Dioxins have been linked to a range of health problems including both defects, cancer, diabetes, neurotoxicity, immune system suppression, a disruption of the hormone system and decreased fertility. Because it undergoes metabolic activation in the liver, PVC is usually formed or leached at the end of its life cycle. Burning it, however, merely releases further dioxins and other dangerous chemicals, generating more hazardous waste to be buried.

Greenpeace worked hard to ensure that the Environmental Guidelines included a commitment to phase out PVC. We continue campaigning to ensure that the Guidelines help kick start alternatives to the PVC industry. The Nike initiative shows that it can be done. Greenpeace is calling on other sportsman manufacturers to follow suit and just do it!

The Good Wood?

Timber should be sourced from sustainably managed forests. Environmental Guidelines for the Sydney Olympic Village.

All timber used in the Sydney Olympic Village must meet the Environmental Guidelines. Unfortunately the jury is still out on whether or not the New South Wales (NSW) Government, which has purchased a new world class system of forest reserves by the end of the year.

Currently timber buyers, such as Olympic builders, purchasing timber from NSW state forests are left guessing about when the timber came from and whether their purchase has contributed to damaging environmentally sensitive areas.

Until the government announces its forest reserve plan, the future of many important NSW old growth, carbon and endangered species habitat areas hangs in the balance. Greenpeace has called on the government to ensure that all high conservation value forests be protected as National Parks. The NSW Government must make the right decision to allow Olympic officials to live up to their Green Guidelines commitments on timber.

Olympic use of timber in the NSW state forest, on the other hand, raises some remaining environmental issues.

Contribution of the Olympic Village, including the Olympic Village, where Olympic athletes will be housed, has just been completed. The Olympic Village is under construction in the Southern Highlands. The design successfully blends timber and steel to create an exciting and harmonious architectural environment.

Since the early days of Olympic venue design, Greenpeace has called for environmentally sustainable timber to be used instead of steel. Steel production is energy intensive and produces polluting greenhouse gases which warm the earth's atmosphere. When sourced from well-managed plantation forests, timber is a better environmental alternative. The massive timber beams used in the Olympic Village roof structure are made entirely of pine timber from Australian softwood plantations.

Over 50 percent of the timber in the Olympic Village will come from softwood timber plantations. Tropical timber used in the Village has been responsibly certified by the non-profit Forest Stewardship Council. Only the sustainability of NSW softwood remains the last hurdle to environmentally sound use in the Olympic Village.

Greenpeace congratulates Nike with a shoe-shaped cake on their decision to go PVC-free. See Page 2 1998.

Olympic Village construction site with Olympic venues by Ben Agnew.

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Greenpeace's 1998 "Special Olympic Report" praised Nike's announcement that it would phase out the use of polyvinyl chloride in its products. The photo inset at the top right is captioned, "Greenpeace congratulates Nike with a shoe-shaped cake on their decision to go PVC-free." The only part of most Nike shoes made from PVC is the "swoosh," according to a Nike representative in Australia.

Australia subscriptions declined from 103,000 in 1992 to 60,000 in 1997.

Like many large environmental organizations that depend on subscriptions and donations, Greenpeace became sensitive to media portrayals of it as being "too radical" and "too negative." When Paul Gilding was promoted from head of Greenpeace Australia to head of Greenpeace International in 1992, he argued that the organization should reinvent itself as an organization that offered "solutions" and worked with industry and government to get those solutions in place. "If we had just kept on saying there was a problem, then people would have switched off," he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

When Lynette Thorstensen replaced Gilding as executive director of Greenpeace Australia, she continued his emphasis on "solution strategies" such as the Olympic Games village design and work on a CFC-free refrigerator. "Greenpeace is now convinced the best path to

progress is via the country's boardrooms," said Australia's *Good Weekend* magazine when it interviewed Thorstensen in 1993. The state Minister for the Olympics, Bruce Baird, wasn't complaining. "They've shown a much more constructive approach lately," he told *Good Weekend*. "It is a new style of environmentalism I find much more persuasive. Before they were seen as ultra-green and opposing everything."

Gilding's business-friendly approach was unpopular with "old guard" environmentalists, and in 1994 he was ousted from his position as head of Greenpeace International. A year and a half later, however, the "solution"/business partnership approach won a major victory when Thilo Bode was appointed to head the organization. An economist from industry with World Bank experience, Bode had no environmental credentials before being appointed to head Greenpeace Germany in 1989. He was hired for his management skills, which he demonstrated by making Greenpeace Germany the richest of all Greenpeace operations. Bode also "engineered internal changes that reduced the power of the seven-member Greenpeace International Board," according to *Time* magazine, "and shifted authority to the executive director."

Like Gilding, Bode believes in working with industry and allowing the Greenpeace name to be used to endorse "green" products such as CFC-free refrigerators made by Westinghouse. This is despite the fact that Westinghouse was listed in *The Greenpeace Book of Greenwash* as a prime example of corporate greenwashing. "In the US, when people hear the name 'Westinghouse' they think of household appliances," it states. "Only rarely does the company publicize another side of its business: nuclear weapons and reactors." This effort at image control will no doubt benefit from the endorsement that Greenpeace has given to its new fridges.

One of Bode's "solutions-oriented" initiatives has been to work with car companies to produce more fuel-efficient cars. Greenpeace Germany has invested \$1.3 million in a Renault car to cut its fuel consumption by about half. This investment and the ensuing promotion of the car has caused some disquiet within Greenpeace among those who believe that the best way to adequately address pollution is to promote public transport rather than energy-efficient cars. One campaigner told Polly Ghazi, who was writing for the *New Statesman*, "We should not be getting into the business of selling cars of any kind."

Even Greenpeace USA is using "solution-oriented" campaigns that give "positive support for new technologies, products, and companies where appropriate,"

Tim Andrews told *Time* magazine in 1996. "It's an effort to sit down with businesses instead of coming out of the woodwork yelling. We use that as a last resort, yes. But we're trying a more diplomatic approach."

In London, Greenpeace UK hosted a \$600-per-head conference in 1996 to identify solutions that could be achieved through alliances between environmentalists and industry. In attendance were delegates from corporations like ICI (a British-based multinational chemical company), British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), BP, Shell, British Agrochemicals and Nestlé. Greenpeace UK Director Peter Melchett argues that "solutions enforcement" is a new form of direct action.

In her article in the *New Statesman*, Polly Ghazi argued that Greenpeace has strayed from its defense of nature to forge "closer ties with its former business enemies," noting that its support of the British Petroleum oil company for its solar power initiatives gave BP huge "public relations capital" for a mere investment of 0.1 percent of the BP group's gross income. Ghazi's article prompted a reply from the campaign program director of Greenpeace UK, who wrote that Greenpeace still opposed "the plan of the other 99.9 per cent part of that company to expand its oil operations into the Atlantic. . . . In the course of our campaigns governments often turn from being opponents to allies. That does not mean Greenpeace is becoming an adjunct or supporter."

More recently BP Amoco has received environmental criticism in the form of a special Greenhouse Greenwash Award from the US group Corporate Watch for its "Plug in the Sun" Program. Corporate Watch noted that "the company hopes that by spending just .01% of its portfolio on solar as it explores for more oil and sells more gasoline, it can convince itself and others of its own slogan: BP knows, BP cares, BP is our leader."

In a similar satiric vein, Greenpeace USA has given BP Amoco's CEO, John Browne, an award for "Best Impression of an Environmentalist" for his "portrayal of BP Amoco as a leader in solar energy" while running a company "with far greater investment in dirty fossil fuels that are causing global warming." Greenpeace USA has opposed drilling and exploration by BP Amoco in Alaska. In this case, the "solutions" approach taken by Greenpeace UK clearly conflicts with Greenpeace campaigns in the USA.

As these examples illustrate, Greenpeace still carries on its historic mission of "bearing witness," but its focus on "solutions" has required Greenpeace to sometimes turn a blind eye to the environmental sins of the companies it works with. The problem is not that everyone in Greenpeace has sold out but that the new emphasis

on solutions is leading to compromises that the former Greenpeace would not have considered.

Corporations and their business magazines are encouraging this nascent tendency, which they see as evidence of growing “maturity” on the part of Greenpeace. “We’ve reached a detente with Greenpeace,” a spokesman for the multinational chemical firm Hoechst told *Time* magazine. A spokesman for Bayer, another multinational chemical company, said “we can conduct substantive discussions with their people.”

“Some in Greenpeace acknowledge that the group’s confrontational tactics are losing effect and can be costly,” crowed *Chemical Week*, noting the shift to “solutions-based campaigning” and to “targeting shareholders and bankers involved in project finance.”

“Mature” is also a word Michael Bland uses to describe the new Greenpeace. Its approach is “now more sophisticated,” he says, because it recognizes “the potential to use the market when that is appropriate.”

“Maturity,” however, can either mark the culmination of development or the beginning of decline. And “sophistication” is sometimes a mere nudge away from sophistry. Greenpeace campaigners may view their emphasis on “solutions” as a natural evolution and a necessary response to changing world conditions. For some

environmentalists such as myself, however, the fear is that this new path is a slippery slope. Will Greenpeace continue to uphold the principles of its founders, or will it become just another symbolic marketing hook, a subscription sold to suburban householders to be taken in regular doses as a palliative for environmental anxiety while they continue their lifestyles as polluting producers and consumers?

The Greenpeace Book of Greenwash, by Jed Greer and Kenny Bruno, points out that “industry has devised a far-reaching program to convince people that [transnational corporations] are benefactors of the global environment.” It warns citizens to look under the surface of corporate announcements of environmental initiatives “and be aware of the overall context in which they exist. It is clear that certain basic characteristics of corporate culture have not changed.” What may be changing, however, is the culture of Greenpeace so that corporate culture is no longer seen to be the problem. n

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Mining PR Exec Lauds Peter Sandman

*Letter from Geoff Kelly, Group Manager Corporate Communication, WMC Limited
Victorian President, Public Relations Institute of Australia*

In “Sandman’s Cagey Tactics” (readers’ letter, Second Quarter 1999), the Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force (NNWTF) seems to miss the point of Peter Sandman’s magic.

I’ve worked with him a number of times, and his greatest impact isn’t with the catchy concepts that are the hallmark of most high-profile consultants. It’s his ability to reduce the outrage that corporate leadership feel when attacked by those they believe use bad science to justify their own righteous outcomes. For issue advocates, the exquisite weakness of most large corporations is their tendency to dumb down to an angry or fearful response when faced by a strong high-profile attack by groups prepared to play hard and dirty with media and public sentiment. They then play them like a fiddle.

Sandman sells a powerful alternative, but one that comes at a price. He provokes corporations to reassess the issue and listen to communities. As the NNWTF allude, this won’t work if it is not backed by genuine flex-

ibility and willingness to change. No group wants to talk for the sake of it. The magic is that the corporate culture has to change, and industrial czars have to share control over outcomes with outsiders who have a stake in the consequences. If you’ve been used to calling the shots in a major company, that is no fun at all. However, Sandman often persuades these reluctant maidens that the alternative is worse.

The result? It cuts the knees off groups who play fast and dirty to achieve an ideological goal with little connection with real community interest. It also humbles corporate people who thought that they knew enough, being people of good values and having done thorough internal research on the project or issue. They often discover new and better ways to achieve their results working with community allies they never dreamed possible.

Peter Sandman? Take another look. He’s dangerous to dinosaurs on both sides of a controversy.

—Geoff Kelly