



# INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the SOCIAL ACTION OFFICE  
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, Queensland

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## Will we STOP Clearing Like There's NO Tomorrow?

The SAO over many years now has researched, educated and lobbied about LAND CLEARING. The current situation is by far the most hopeful yet. If the current proposal between the Queensland and the Federal Governments comes to fruition, broad-scale clearing of remnant bushland in rural areas of Queensland will be phased out by 2006!

the SAO website and read the updated (July 2003) *Vegetation Clearance in Queensland* Briefing Note: <http://sao.clriq.org.au/publications/vegetat.html>

### The Water Circle – an associated strategy ...

The Social Action Office has established a new group – the **Water Circle**. This has been established in the International Year of Fresh Water as part of the SAO priority area of *Living Sustainably*.

The first meeting of the group was held at Justice Place on 17 July 2003. At this meeting a discussion was held about participation in SAO activities and its processes and people's particular interests and concerns with water.

The group is primarily interested in the future of the Murray-Darling River system, and showed great interest in the fact that the source of the Murray-Darling river system begins in Queensland in the Darling Downs and Barwon River catchment areas.



### Queensland Needs Your Help ... please!

Wherever you are in Australia, would you please consider filling in the postcard enclosed with this newsletter. Land clearing is a national issue and what is happening in Queensland is critical for everyone's future. Australia is the 6<sup>th</sup> highest land clearer on the planet and Queensland does the most clearing in Australia. This could change! It is critical that the proposal goes beyond verbal agreements and becomes a reality. People in other States of Australia see more clearly than those in Queensland the effects of long-term, broad-scale clearing and it is well known that it's a hundred times more expensive to rectify the problem than to prevent land being cleared. For more details on this current negotiation, go to: [http://wilderness.org.au/member/tws/projects/Woodlands/act\\_up\\_jul.html](http://wilderness.org.au/member/tws/projects/Woodlands/act_up_jul.html).



Murray-Darling Basin

For a more complete analysis of the land clearing issue, visit

Continued on page 2

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## Book Review

Perhaps one of the most difficult things to cope with in our human relationships is a lack of truth telling. It's not just that most of us don't like being conned. Outright lies or the distortion of the truth result in the breakdown of trust between people and ultimately the failure of relationships.

The lack of truth telling is far more than a personal problem and has come to be one that has the potential of damaging us as a society. This reality has been made clear by the recent publication of *Dark Victory* by the journalists David Marr and Marian Wilkinson.

The authors have done us a service by recounting the dramatic chain of events in 2001 that began when the people aboard a sinking boat were taken aboard the *Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo ship. These asylum seekers, and others, were to be detained in Nauru and Papua New Guinea as part of the so-called "Pacific solution".

With access to information that resulted from a subsequent Senate inquiry and other sources we now have a more complete version of the events than what was offered to us at the time. Underlying these events was a manipulation of aspects of the law, a misrepresentation of events to the Australian people, a misuse of the Australian defence forces and the use of the public service in a political campaign.

For many we remember these events because of the shameful way in which the asylum seekers were treated. But we as a

nation were also profoundly harmed by the events in which normal standards of truth telling and accountability were lost. As the country was in the lead-up to a national election the temptation to fudge the issues was great. Unfortunately lost standards are hard to recover.

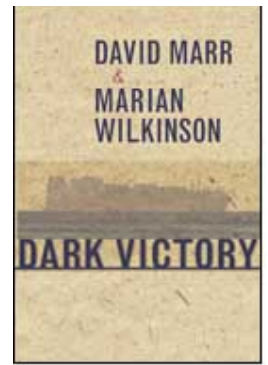
*Dark Victory* is an important record of the working of government. The events are recounted clearly and in simple statements of fact. The prosaic style highlights the way in which truth of the events was denied or manipulated.

What *Dark Victory* reveals is that when the Afghans were transferred to the *Manoora* they were not housed in the accommodation section but were locked below deck on the tank deck, the ship's garage. Here there was no daylight, no relief from the stinking heat or the incessant noise of the engines, no privacy. They had access to three bathrooms from ten at night to six in the morning for 438 people. After eight days below deck the Afghans were allowed onto the helideck for a couple of hours twice a week.

As it has been famously noted (John 8:32) truth and freedom go together for all of us, asylum seekers or citizens of this nation. In the events covered in this book we all lose out.

*Dark Victory*, D Marr & M Wilkinson, Allen & Unwin, 2003

*Kath Luchetti rsj, Perthville NSW*



***During times of universal deceit,  
telling the truth is a revolutionary act.***

George Orwell

Continued from page 1

Victoria Kearney, the new project officer engaged by SAO, addressed the meeting and said that she was interested in supporting the group in developing their own strategy to influence water policy issues both in Queensland and at a Federal level. She discussed the maze of policy issues at local, State and Federal government levels, and it was decided that a presentation will be made at the next meeting to explore these complexities. She stated that some of the points of concern in policy are:

- improving cross-border management of water,
- consideration of the privatisation of water as a resource versus a commodity to be traded,
- property rights, ecology and catchment management,
- water use and the production of food and trade profit as an issue for all Australians, and
- participation of those most affected by water policy decisions being involved and responsible for those decisions.

**The next meeting of the Water Circle will be held in Brisbane at Justice Place on 21 August at 6.00pm – anyone is welcome to join.**

### **Do you live in the Murray-Darling Basin?**

In preparation for our first *Water Circle* gathering we checked the Australian Catholic Directory and found out that there are 21 different congregations in 123 different towns *that we know of* within the Murray-Darling Basin. This crosses four States and one Territory. We know there are some smaller towns not marked on the detailed map that we have and we know that there are several communities of some congregations in some towns – e.g. Canberra, Goulburn, Perthville, Wagga Wagga, etc.

No doubt people who live in the Basin are very aware of the issues at hand and most likely involved in working towards solutions to the problems. We would like to hear from anyone who would like to network and share resources etc.

# Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement – *Why we need to get active*

Janice Howard OSU

**D**o you get the feeling that we are fast becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the USA? The deployment of Australian forces in the war against Iraq without consultation of our Parliament certainly supports that view. Less well recognised are the realities hidden in the much vaunted United States Free Trade Agreement (USFTA).

During last week about 50 Australian government officials met in Hawaii for the third round of talks on the proposed FTA. There has been some comment in the media – an article by Malcolm Cole (*Perspectives* 17/7/03) claiming to ‘dispel the myths’; it all depends on what you see as myths.

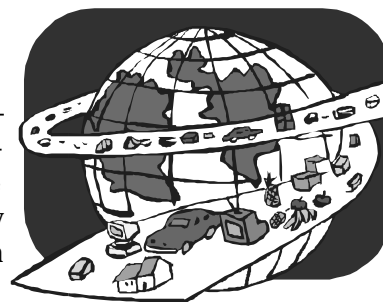
**What would our gains be?** The Australian Government wants to pursue the FTA because it envisages substantial gains in access to the US for Australian farmers. That sounds great. However, we know the power of the US farm lobby and many are sceptical that the US government would concede us access to US agricultural markets. From these most recent talks, word is about “staging” the changes – nothing too quickly. In fact it is not so long since the US legislated to **increase** agricultural subsidies.

**And the danger signals?** This “agreement” has been compared to one between an elephant and a mouse! It is estimated that our economy is the size of Pennsylvania’s. The US has little need for such an agreement, Australia would have to make concessions. **The US has targeted the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Australia’s local content rules in film and television, our quarantine law and Foreign Investment Review Board as “barriers to trade”.** While the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) assures us that the US has no intention to **abolish** these entities, changes are certainly being considered with little public awareness. We know how subtly words can be used in politics! To look at these points in detail:

1. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme makes medicines more affordable to most Australians. (US pharmaceutical companies object to it because it means that the price of medicines is lower in Australia than in the US.) This is a vital health and social equity policy which should not be targeted as a trade barrier.
2. The Screen Producers’ Association, The Film Commission and Media Unions have strongly defended local content rules and pointed to wide community support and previous bipartisan political support for them. The local content rules are a vital pillar of Australia’s cultural identity and ensure that Australian stories are told on film and television. These rules ensure a local skills base which enables quality films and television programs

to be made here.

3. How can we contemplate reducing quarantine rules in the wake of the Mad Cow and Foot and Mouth disease scares?
4. Australia has investment restrictions on only a few strategic industries like the media, banking, telecommunications and airlines. Tampering with the Foreign Investments Review Board could render all these industries vulnerable to US takeovers.



Furthermore, as Ann Capling, a Melbourne University trade expert has indicated, a proposed link between security and trade is really frightening. **“It’s been a cornerstone of both Australian and US foreign policy since World War II that security and trade issues are kept in separate boxes. To see them linked now has major implications for the Australia-US security alliance.”** US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick sent a letter on November 13, 2002 to the US Congress notifying them of the FTA negotiation. In it, alongside a list of trade issues, he refers to **“strengthening the foundations of our security alliance”** and **“promotion of common values so we can work together more effectively with third world countries”**.

Beyond the immediacy of the proposed Free Trade Agreement, we still need to be watchful re what is happening with the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Religious Congregations have over the last century made huge investments in health and education, seeking to meet the needs particularly of the less privileged. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), signed by the Australian Government in 1994, covers these services along with many others. While GATS has some rules which allow government regulation of public services, we need to be very watchful of the fine print. Earlier this year the European Commission was asking for the inclusion of public water and postal services in the GATS. We know how adversely that would affect Australians in rural areas.

In summary, it is urgent for us, in ministry as religious, to be very clear about these issues and to be active in writing and speaking to other Australians as well as to our parliamentary representatives. Among resources for this article I have used newsletters from AFTINET (Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network), an important resource for all concerned with economic justice in our society, and in particular for leadership teams of religious congregations. Website for AFTINET is: [www.aftinet.org.au](http://www.aftinet.org.au) and they can be contacted by fax on (02) 9299 7855. ■

## DATE CLAIMER

The Second **Common Wealth for the Common Good Address** will be held at the O'Shea Centre (Brisbane) on World Food Day – 16 October 2003 commencing at 7.30pm. The topic this year will be **The Moral Challenges of Shaping a Sustainable Earth Community**. Watch this space for more details!

## The Peace Circle

A SAO priority for 2003 is *Creating a Culture of Peace*. An initial meeting was held to explore ways of furthering this agenda area. Tony Kitchen, Global and Peace Educator from QCEC, shared a framework for peace making. Copies of this are available from the SAO. The idea we are following through at this stage is to maximise opportunities to truly enter processes that may lead to a conversion of heart. The concept of *shadow* was identified as one to explore, so we are forming a *Peace Circle* on 4 August to read the book *Kissing the Dark* by Patrick Hederman (a monk from Glenstal Abbey In Limerick). The reading circle will meet monthly. If you are interested in this, please contact the office for more details.

## Computers for Sale!

SAO has 4 iMac computers for sale. They are for sale because SAO is switching to PCs. The computers are in excellent working condition and all come with Mac OS 9.1. These are the details:

3 x iMac Blueberry 350Mhz-6Gb-CD-512k-56k - \$700.00 each (2 x 128Mb, 1 x 160Mb RAM)

1 x iMac Graphite 400Mhz-384Mb-13Gb-CD/DVD-Fwire - \$800.00

Software CDs (1 of each) available are:

Microsoft Office:mac 2001 (includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Entourage) - \$300.00

Adobe PageMaker 6.5 for Mac - \$300.00

Macromedia Dreamweaver 4, Fireworks 3, Flash 4, Freehand 8.0.1 for Mac - \$150.00

Other equipment:

Teac External USB Floppy Drive for Mac - \$40.00

Iomega Zip 100 Drive + 11 Mac Zip Disks and 3 PC Zip Disks - \$100.00

Selling immediately. First in, first served. Contact SAO if you are interested.

## For Your Calendar

### 2003 - International Year of FreshWater



#### AUGUST

- 4 National Aboriginal and Islander Childrens Day
- 6 Hiroshima Day 1945
- 8 Feastday of Mary MacKillop
- 8 Atom bomb dropped at Nagasaki 1945
- 9 International Day of the World's Indigenous People
- 16 Traditional land returned to Gurindji people 1975
- 18 Landcare Week commences
- 23 International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition
- 24 Refugee and Migrant Sunday
- 25 World Migration Day
- 26 MV Tampa rescues 433 asylum seekers from a sinking vessel in 2001. Australian government refuses entry to its shores and sends troops to prevent disembarkation.
- 28 250,000 Civil Rights supporters attend the March on Washington. Dr Martin Luther King Jr delivers the "I have a dream" speech 1963
- 28 **Sophia Circle 12 noon at Justice Place - I Have a Dream**
- 30 78.5% of East Timorese people vote for an independent East Timor 1999
- 31 Keep Australia Beautiful Week commences

#### SEPTEMBER

- 1 Wattle Day
- 2 Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991
- 7 National Threatened Species Day
- 8 International Literacy Day
- 8-175th World Parks Congress, Durban, South Africa
- 10 International Day of Peace
- 12 Death of Steve Biko 1977
- 15 Racial Hatred Act Australia 1995
- 16 International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer
- 24 Aung San Suu Kyi (Burma) forms National League for Democracy 1988
- 28 Social Justice Sunday

#### OCTOBER

- 1 **Sophia Circle 5pm at Justice Place - Whiteness**
- 1 International Day of Older Persons
- 2 Mahatma Gandhi born 1869
- 3 Walk to Work Day
- 5 UN World Teachers' Day
- 5 Respect the Beach Day
- 6 World Habitat Day
- 16 World Food Day
- 16 **Second Common Wealth for the Common Good Address - O'Shea Centre at 7.30pm**
- 17 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- 19 National Water Week 2003 commences
- 24 United Nations Day
- 24 Disarmament Week commences
- 26 National Bird Week commences

*The Social Action Office wishes to acknowledge the recent death of Sr Mary Mills rsm, Congregational Leader of the Cairns Sisters of Mercy. Mary was a wonderful supporter of the work of the SAO and we were deeply saddened to hear of her passing. May she enjoy abundant peace for ever.*

