



GREEN ACTIVISM IS PUTTING OUR NATION IN THE RED

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Radical groups demonise specific goods and services causing them to be banned or imposing increased costs on buyers and sellers

The instigators of this activity describe each new ban or cost imposition as having only minor effects – indeed in some cases, like preventing the use of cheap fossil fuels, embargos are sold as bringing economy-wide cost savings.

The immediate targets of these green campaigns are modern agriculture, use of water, low cost energy and mining but everybody loses from them.

A recent focus of green activism is plastic bags. These are opposed on the grounds that they are a component of litter and because they are made from fossil fuels, the current number one bogeyman.

With regard to litter, plastic bags contribute only three per cent of the total stream and littering itself is far more a factor of general civic pride and consideration of others than it is about its actual components.

But it is the public pillorying of fossil fuels that provides the main driver in the plastic bag banning campaign.

State governments in South Australia and Queensland have already banned the products.

Disturbingly, Coles and Woollies have also announced a phase-out. That they did so simultaneously looks like collusion, a matter that would normally be subject of ACCC investigation but, as in so many other theatres, environmental excuses override the law.

Some argue that the supermarkets should not subsidise the use of plastic bags. However, the cost of the bags themselves are trivial (about two cents each) and for many customers they are valued component of the retailing service they seek.

The proposers of the ban claim to have broad support – the “boomerang alliance” attacking plastic bags is said to comprise 47 different groups - and will attack political parties and businesses not supporting their cause through social and conventional media.

By such means activist groups are imposing their agendas on people who just want to get on with life.

Another recent outcome of green activism was seen with the closure and government bailout of Victoria’s largest remaining timber mill at Heyfield.

Activists, rather like England’s Norman conquerors, want exclusive use of the forests and ruthlessly prevent people working them. Unlike the Norman kings, modern day greens want the area not for hunting but for bush walking.

Wood harvesting has been under constant attack from green groups in Australia for over three decades. In Victoria we had a group of bureaucrats improbably called “the Competent Authority” who would chip away each year at the available harvestable forest.

In the 1990s this morphed into the Regional Forest Agreements which were to resolve for all time the protected/harvestable split.

No sooner was it signed, when green agitation recommenced and native log production now stands at only one third of its level in the year 2000. Only 6 per cent of Victoria’s forests are available for felling of which 0.04 per cent is actually cut each year. The final straw breaking the back of the Heyfield mill was the alleged threat to Leadbeater’s Possum requiring another 40 per cent reduction in timber availability.

Green activists’ prominence is undermining our conveniences and living standards by preventing us exercising our own preferences.

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