



Koala Kolumn

by Sonya Nourse

Spring – the perfect time of the year for spotting koalas; not too hot for a pleasant walk in the bush and plenty of koala activity. Koala spotting does not have to entail wandering around with your head craned back at an uncomfortable angle squinting into the bright sunshine. The following tips, plus a bit of luck, are bound to bring success.

First, enquire about locations where koalas have been sighted or be guided by signage. Spotting a koala requires attention to detail. Effort is well placed both on the ground as well as above in the trees. Walking needs to be leisurely and casual as koalas are generally inactive creatures for most of the day and are well camouflaged.

About every 10 – 20 paces stop and widely scan the trees all around you and at all levels. Staying where you are, repeat the scan but this time focus on trees closer to you, if you move your line of sight in a systematic way along the line of the branch, your vision will gradually adjust to see variations of dark or light clumps, or some slight movement that might indicate the presence of a koala. The

angle of vision is important when looking for koalas as branches and foliage are quite complicated, so investigate the tree from as many angles as possible.

As koalas are comfortably ensconced in the fork of a tree (often for 20 hours or more) you can expect to find small piles of koala poo (scats) at the base of a tree or the ground below the canopy. Scats are cylindrical in shape (basically elongated oval pellets) and are about 2 – 3 cm long and 1 cm in diameter and when fresh are a green chaff colour, hardening to a deep brown the less fresh they are. They are a good indication that a koala is in the tree or has passed through fairly recently.

Look for claw markings on the trees as koalas have long, extremely sharp claws that assist them to climb the smooth bark of the eucalyptus. These claws leave characteristic marks on the tree trunks. If the tree is a hot favourite then there may be abundant marks for the first 5 metres or so.

Focus on trees that koalas are more likely to inhabit like eucalypts, but still look in trees you might least expect to find a koala. Either for minor dietary supplementation or for shelter, koalas have been known to sit in a wide variety of trees. Radio tracking a recently released koala, we found him nestled up comfortably in a stand of camphor laurels and privet with plenty of good quality eucalypts to choose from nearby!

When we were kids racing down the lane at Broadwater on our pushbikes koala spotting was much simpler and easier – the focus then was on how many koalas you could count by the time you had wolfed down the handfuls of sandwiches your aunts had pressed upon you in return for some peace and quiet!

Good luck with your spotting. Remember to pause before looking up and scan the ground for those scats - even experienced spotters can be tricked by angle and light, staring up into a sun-dappled canopy. Wear good quality walking shoes, take plenty of water, a wide brimmed hat and of course the Aussie obligatories of a cuppa and some goodies to share along the way.

Information about koalas, koala food trees and Friends of the Koala is available at www.friendsofthekoala.org or email info@friendsofthekoala.org or phone Friends of the Koala's (24/7) Rescue Hotline: 6622-1233.



Hemp seed quest leads to Griffith

by Klara Marosszeky

On 15 August, Andrew Kavasilas, Deb Felton and I headed 1500 kms south to Griffith, to meet Patrick Calabria and have a look at two ten-hectare plantings of industrial hemp that he grew under licence this year.

Patrick is a horticultural scientist and one of Australia's leading industrial hemp breeders. He's travelled widely, collecting seed from different landraces of hemp from China and Europe and has an extensive seedbank of cultivars.

Seed breeding is a lengthy process and the THC related legislation governing the



Successful. Patrick Calabria and a broadacre hemp farm at Griffith (above); and Andrew next to one of the plants grown in a selection trial at Patrick's home (below). Photos: Deb Felton

hemp industry requires that only stable low THC seed varieties are planted for commercial production. Patrick's claim to fame, as far as we're concerned, is that he's developed a high seed and fibre yielding cultivar, based on Chinese cultivars, that will produce well in temperate and tropical climates. So part of the trip was about negotiating a secure seed agreement for the commercial farmers in the region planting for fibre this season.

We also went with the hope of convincing Patrick to work further with the Northern Rivers Hemp Association. One of the Association's goals is to produce a regional variety of hemp seed, another is to maintain seed supply at fair rates to farmers.

We're operating under the assumption that if the industry takes care of and benefits a lot of people, it'll be strong. Dept of Primary Industries and Southern Cross University are backing that, and have agreed to

work with us in the coming season. We've collectively applied for funding from Rural Industries Regional Development Corporation (RIRDC).

A further goal is to develop a stable dual-purpose cultivar for this climate, with a good quality seed for human consumption and fibre for industrial applications.

Although the NSW legislation is finally through, we're still waiting on Federal legislation to legalise hemp as a food in Australia. It seems likely though that the food discussion will be tabled in the near future, given that globally only Australia and New Zealand are dragging the chain over hemp as a food.

Licence applications will be advertised at the beginning of October and available through Dept Primary Industries. Also anyone interested in information on the developing regional hemp industry should check out <http://www.northernrivershemp.org>



Presentation in Lismore

The eco-socialist alternative
Eyewitness reports from Venezuela and Cuba
Thursday 16th October 6.30pm,
Winsome Hotel, North Lismore.

While rich countries dither over climate change, radical movements and governments across Latin America are rapidly moving to meet the crisis. Speakers Jim McIlroy, author of the new book, **Voices from Venezuela**, and Robyn Francis, of the Cuba Australia Permaculture Exchange will discuss exciting new experiments in participatory democracy, social justice and sustainability.

Entry by donation proceeds



to Green Left Weekly and CAPE. For more information phone 6622-2021 or email northernrivers@socialist-alliance.org

Roberto Perez (left) and Robyn Francis visiting the El Rancho Permaculture Organiponico gardens in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, later hit by hurricane Ike.

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Greenfest – for a cooler planet

All this talk about climate change and our Government's planned Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme might leave many of us feeling confused about what seemed to be common sense.

But there's an event being built from a suburban house in Brisbane that has chosen not to focus on doom, gloom and taxes, has hit No 1 on Google and will be Australia's largest free green event in its first year.

"Greenfest" will be opened at noon

on Friday 10th October by world-renowned naturalist and UN Peace Ambassador Dr Jane Goodall, who has described Greenfest as a "wonderful grassroots initiative, highlighting Brisbane's leadership and commitment to conservation."

Greenfest runs until 10pm on the Friday night, all day Saturday 11th October from 10am to 10pm, and on Sunday 12th from 10am to 5pm.

It will bring together over 150 private

community initiatives that can halve a household's carbon footprint by simply changing consumer preferences. At the Green Motor Show you can see cars and other innovative choices to halve your petrol bill and at the Green Street Mall, see practical choices for greener fashion, homewares, and construction.

Over 30 organic producers will share the sweet tastes of organic, and all of Brisbane's Universities have joined in to show the power of making cooler decisions for the planet in all careers.

The festival uniquely weaves these exhibits though a landscape of music, art, speakers, film and fun. The free film festival will feature 12-15 short films by local film makers and the newly released Julian Lennon production "Whale Dreamers", with director Kim Kindersley and lead story teller Bunna Lawrie at the screening.

Greenfest is expected to attract 50,000 visitors over the three days. Founder Colman Ridge said, "The change we are seeking is cultural. Stopping for a few hours and sharing will generate the type of energy we need to create the outcomes we hope for."

For more information on all the Greenfest attractions, exhibitors, speakers, music acts and more, visit www.greenfest.com.au

Survive and Thrive in the Aussie Bush

by Koa Windsong

Having the skills to walk into the bush and survive in any habitat is self-empowering.

Beyond that, in these times of economic collapse, world war and Earth changes, it is I feel, our duty of care to know how to survive in the bush. Not from a place of fear, but rather a place of compassion and with the will to live in harmony and with the spirit of love.

Many people have been inspired by the films Mark Jago and I have made together and they want to learn hands-on. Thus I have teamed up with another knowledgeable bushman, Gareth Wise, to offer a weekend course on emergency shelter, fire awareness, water collection and purification, bushcraft, wild foods and much more.

When the last world economic collapse happened,

90 percent of the people in America and Australia lived in the bush. They had gardens and food storage as well as basic bush survival knowledge. Today 10 percent of the people live in the bush and the other 90 percent don't have gardens, food storage or bush knowledge (with very few exceptions).

In this weekend course you will be inspired to align with nature and your intuition.

The course will be held on the weekend of 25th-26th October at a cost of \$250 per person.

For bookings and further information phone (02) 6689-7027 or email koawindsong@hotmail.com

NB. Two scholarships are available for people who want to help with meals and other logistics over the weekend.



Farming focus at Sustainable Living Expo

Under one roof at Lismore's North Coast National Show, 16-19th October, the Southern Cross University Sustainable Living Expo will showcase Australia's finest thinking in carbon neutral living, renewable energy, sustainable buildings and better ways for us to manage our resources.

Showcasing renewable energy, sustainable building and design, recycling/waste management, sustainable farm practices, food self-sufficiency and carbon neutral living, the expo will feature interactive and static displays, practical workshops, "Talking Tent" presentations, and a strong NSW Schools engagement and presence.

On the Friday the talking tent will be specifically focussing on Sustainable Farming and will have a number of Department of Primary Industry and Southern Cross University speakers there as well as (hopefully) the farming community. Keith Bolton will present a Hemp Farming talk, and Klara Marosszeky will conduct hemp masonry



workshops.

All events will highlight practical ways to work, live and play with the environment, not against it.

Now there's another reason to go to the Lismore Show this year.

Sustainable practices. Fenced farm wetland. The Expo will present, workshop and discuss all the latest technology, products and services to progress the community, business and agriculture towards sustainability.

Photo courtesy NSW Dept of Primary Industry

GRIST

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ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS FROM WWW.GRIST.ORG

It's a Clean Job, But Somebody's Gotta Do It

California air agency says cutting emissions will boost economy

California's 2006 law requiring the state to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 would help boost its economy and save residents more money in the long term than doing nothing, according to a report by the influential California Air Resources Board. The state's draft plan for reducing emissions focuses on requiring utilities to generate one-third of their electricity from renewables, increasing the energy efficiency of state buildings, and requiring new vehicles sold in the state to significantly reduce their greenhouse-gas emissions. By 2020, such measures would create some 100,000 new jobs, increase per-capita income by \$200, and lower electricity bills by some 5 percent, according to the report. "These are good-news numbers," said CARB's Mary Nichols. Environmentalists largely agreed. "This is the green-light analysis that says we should keep pushing on this," said James Fine of the Environmental Defense Fund. "It's only going to help our economy, not hurt it."

Shelter from the Storm

White roofs could help keep climate change at bay

This whole climate-change debacle could be significantly slowed down if the world's 100 largest cities installed white roofs and more-reflective pavement, says new research in the journal Climatic Change. It may sound like greenwhitewashing, but physicist Hashem Akbari crunches the numbers: By bouncing heat away from the Earth, a 1,000-square-foot white roof offsets 10 metric tons of greenhouse gases. Roofs account for 25 percent of the surface of most cities, and pavement makes up some 35 percent. Thus, going White-House-style could offset 44 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases -- more than is emitted by Earthlings each year. "I call it win-win-win," says Akbari. "First, a cooler environment not only saves energy but improves comfort. Second, cooling a city by a few degrees dramatically reduces smog. And the third win is offsetting global warming."

Now They've Gone and Gordon It

Greenpeace protesters acquitted in coal-activism case

In a decision that anti-coal activists say is a game-changer, six Greenpeace protesters have been acquitted of nearly \$53,000 in criminal-damage charges for painting "Gordon" on a British coal plant. The activists climbed a 650-foot coal-plant chimney last year with the intent to paint "Gordon bin it" in huge letters, aiming to pressure Prime Minister Gordon Brown to disallow new coal plants. They only got to "Gordon" before being served with a high court injunction. In court, the six used a "lawful excuse" defense, arguing that burning coal exacerbates climate change, thus putting property around the world "in immediate need of protection." Climate scientist James Hansen testified on their behalf, and the jury found in their favor. "This verdict marks a tipping point for the climate change movement," says chimney-scaler Ben Stewart. "If jurors from the heart of Middle England say it's legitimate for a direct action group to shut down a coal-fired power station because of the harm it does to our planet, then where does that leave government energy policy?"

I Think You Sink

Old-growth forests absorb more CO2 than they release, study finds

Most of the world's old-growth forests actively absorb more carbon dioxide than they release into the atmosphere, making them effective carbon sinks, according to a new study in the journal Nature. The research, which relies on data from over 500 forests around the world, refutes the commonly held assertion that old-growth forests are merely carbon neutral, absorbing only as much carbon as they release. Instead, the study found, forests between 15 and 800 years old typically not only act as active carbon sinks, but collectively act as a storehouse for up to 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, some 10 percent of the world's total net CO2 uptake. "The absolute amount of carbon stored in these forests is significant," said forest-science professor Beverly Law. "If you have an old forest on the ground, it's probably better to leave it there than to cut it."

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The Inevitable End of the Central Banking and Political Money Regime



by Thomas H. Greco, Jr. www.Reinventingmoney.com

The present disorder in the financial markets and the cascading failures of financial institutions come as no surprise. Those who recognize the impossibility of perpetual exponential growth and who understand how compound interest is built into the global system of money and banking expect the continuation of periodic "bubbles" and "busts," each of increasing amplitude until the systems shakes itself apart.

Engineers call this phenomenon, "positive feedback." Such a system cannot find equilibrium. Imagine a heating system in which the thermostat, sensing a rise in temperature, calls for more heat instead of less. Such is the nature of the debt-money system. The imposition of interest on the debt by which money is created, demands that more debt be created. Such is the debt imperative which gives rise to a growth imperative. Among other things, it prevents the emergence of a steady state economy.

Is this the final round? Who can say? Can the system be saved yet one more time? Maybe. Under the central banking regime which has become all but universal in countries around the world, money has been politicized. The collusion between politicians and international bankers enables governments to extract wealth from the economy by deficit spending and banks to extract wealth by charging interest on money as they create it by making loans. These two parasitic elements take wealth away from productive members of society and lavish it on military adventures, international intrigues, wasteful boondoggles, and financial finaglers.

When the system spins out of control what will come out of the chaos? It is impossible to predict but here are two strong possibilities. When the dollar collapses the financial and political elite class will certainly try to orchestrate a new global monetary regime based on the same old mechanisms for centralizing power and concentrating wealth in their own hands, seeking to complete the New (feudal) World Order which has been abuilding for the past three hundred years. Another possibility is the emergence of the kind of decentralized, democratic, and sustainable system we have been advocating for a long time.

We had better get ready to seize the opportunity that accompanies this impending crisis.

How? By organizing ourselves in our local communities and affinity groups to reclaim the credit commons, to create interest-free, non-dollar, non-bank exchange mechanisms and payment media. This is not as hard as it seems We already know how to do it. All it takes is organization and will.

Back to the current crisis, we should consider the possible actions of America's creditors. According to Paul Joseph Watson and Yihan Dai, in an article in 'Prison Planet' (prisonplanet.com) dated Friday, September 19, 2008, "China Finance, China News and Chaobao Financial News, all state owned media outlets, slammed the Fed for taking action that will only make long term economic conditions worse and devalue the dollar by "creating money that does not exist which leads to the inflation of liquidity," a policy contrary to China's position as a holder of vast reserves of US dollars."

Central banks have one true function, that is to manage the effects of the parasitic drain, to decide who will pay the price, who will feel the pain. They can either (1) restrict credit, thus causing recessions, bankruptcies and unemployment; or (2) they can expand credit and inflate the money supply by monetizing debts (either public or private) that are uncollectible.

Given China's position as one of the United States' biggest creditors, it is in a powerful position to determine the outcome of the current and future financial crises. If they don't like the restructuring plan that the financial elite wants to put in place, they can kick over the table by dumping their dollar holdings and causing the value of the dollar to crash through the floor. Organised others acting in co-operation might do the same. "The king is dead, long live the king."

Thomas H. Greco, Jr. is a community and monetary economist, educator, writer, and consultant. His book, "The End of Money" will be published early next year by Chelsea Green.

Activate Synchronicity

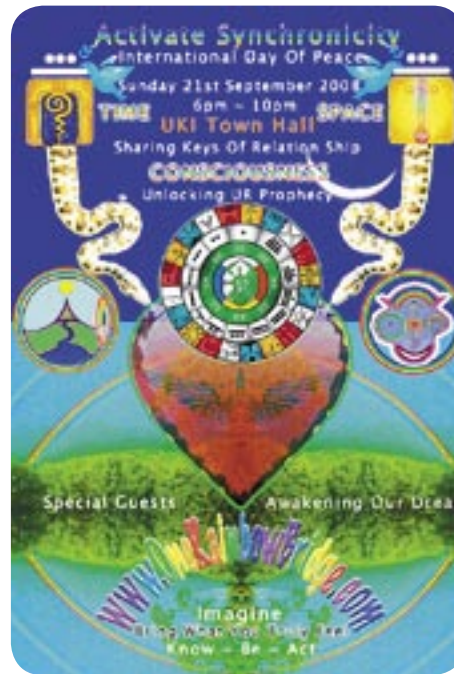
by David Peace=One Love

More than 7 billion people snugly embedded into the Uki Town Hall, All enjoyed popping uni corn in the kitchen by the front door.

Welcome
A moment's notice as we rose the feelings flawed
Our flowering chancing the prophet's moored
Sailing our relations shipped from the fatal shore
Acknowledging we came from beyond before

With God mantra brought threw soundly
Following jingi wala didge vibing roundly
We set sights on self remembered proudly
Healing remedied from theories feeling cloudy

Golden Babies appeared in front of us
Keynotes delivering synthesis of us and them verses
International years of peace activating choices
We people with voices



Oneness was simple and honest
Employed by the Great Spirit's best
Buddha, Krishna and Mohammed
worshipped Moses
And every one was peace full with Je he's us

We eclipsed the records universal creatives
Witnessing the moon spinning heavenly directives
As spiders dancing web objectives
Inspired our flying through cyberspace subjectives

A knower's arc grew itself upon the hearth
Arching its way from Robin's Hood
Waved in the threshold of the great ocean Goliath
Where little babe DAVID stood

Overall it was a good night as bad ass perspective
We remembered to listen and this medicine
Was conceive, believe achieve
Know what I mean?

For an in depth report tune to – www.OneRainbowBridge.com

Commonsense Human Values

Eighteenth in a series by Laurie Stubbs



We're very close now to the focus of all these articles -- creating a new self-consistent set of values to guide human actions. This article spells out the way to do it, and the background to the need for a new value set.

The aim of creating a sample set of values is to allow argument about the common sense and usability of the whole idea. Given that our societies have a mis-mash of guiding ideas drawn from many sources, as we've seen over past articles; also that planet Earth is severely stressed; and that wars and conflict are everywhere, there is a realistic need for a new value system, for human self-guidance.

How do we use the LDI principle to develop a new set of human values? We point the question "does it help life to develop itself." at a range of life actions/scenes, and think about how to make a statement that will guide action so that "life is helped to develop itself"

We know that the set of values coming from applying the question "does it help life to develop itself." deal only with what humanity can do at the moment. It does not deal with human

genetic engineering for example, nor interplanetary pollution, nor with telepathy, and much more. The LDI principle might well be used to help think through some of these things, but for the moment we leave them aside. It is worth re-emphasis that humanity will need to look at new and upcoming human capacities and think out values for them — well ahead of time.

In applying the question "does it help life to develop itself?" these concepts are used:

Life is all forms of life; Earth's total chain of life is bacteria through to mankind. Life is a cycle; includes death and decay, includes seeding and birth. Life is long term, billions of years between beginnings and now, and perhaps into the future

Development is change in the direction of greater adaptiveness, physically, mentally and any other way. The adapting person displays behaviour likely to overcome a commonly faced problem..

Language range and style of the value statements is aimed at giving the broadest coverage of human conditions and decisions. Some statements may not strictly be "values" but set the outlooks which back up the values themselves. In this way values statements can be applied to a greater number of specific situations. Wherever a specific case like environmental pollution demonstrates that a value is needed to deal with it, then the words used are of a general rather than specific nature.

Structure A set of statements of values flowing from using Life Develops Itself (from now on referred to as LDI) has clear-cut features. We start with the individual, then progress to the first group up the hierarchy, the family, and on up to the group of families. Area, and State, and nation, and finally world bodies, would be based on these values, and if needed others derived from the base question, "does it help life to develop itself?"

The LDI principle affects all values that steer humanity in a world of change, and in its relationship with Earth. The need is for a simple system, so at the outset it's clear there is a group of 'big', and a much larger group of 'small' decisions facing anyone using the new values. LDI has a direct bearing on most of the big decisions in life. Many, many decisions will have no relationship to LDI, or at best a tenuous connection; generally these will be smaller matters. It is conceivable that a decision to place a brick here or there in a wall could influence the direction taken by life from some point where the brick becomes part of a critical set of conditions. But any attempt to check all decisions against LDI will make the whole business bog down; the attempt to tease out remote connections with the principle will have the same effect. The Keynote is: we are attempting to "steer" a different direction; we are not trying to avoid every pothole.

Next article will begin the presentation of the set of values itself.

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Artificial Intelligence

by Warwick Fry

The question of Artificial Intelligence in computers is often confused with the issue of 'consciousness'. While advances have been made in developing Artificial Intelligence (or 'AI') there is still a long way to go before the kinds of machine intelligences that can be said to be 'conscious' emerge. William Gibson, in his prophetic 'cyberpunk' novels (Gibson invented the term 'cyberspace' in the 1980s), *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, gives us a few clues as to what these might be like. One thing he does seem to suggest is that computer processing power and connectivity would have to reach a 'critical mass' for this to happen, and that initially at least, it would have to be linked in some way with human consciousness.

AI in computers does replicate some of our own thinking processes. One of the major developments in AI research was 'neural networking'. Without getting too technical this means essentially, that the computer is 'told' to use several methods of solving a problem simultaneously, and to remember its 'mistakes'. It has available to it several ways of arriving at an answer to a question. As one particular way of arriving at a conclusion works more frequently than others, the computer 'learns' to try this particular method first, or to evolve 'rules' to be applied when solving other problems of a similar nature. The computer in effect 'learns' from experience, as we humans, (hopefully) do.

While AI research, particularly during the Cold War, was based on the mathematics of 'game theory' during the 1990s (and after the "Big Blue" computer defeated the world chess champion) AI moved more in the direction of data analysis. During the nineties it took off in a trajectory parallel to that of the Internet. This was not a coincidence. A key function of data analysis is to 'seek and find' the data you want. The story of Yahoo is now the stuff of legend. Yahoo was a piece of freeware developed by a couple of post graduate college students as a kind of exercise, was snapped up by a venture capital company, and is now a billion dollar enterprise. Google has replaced Yahoo's dominant position in the last few years by the simple expedient of investing most of its research money into developing better, more powerful search algorithms, which are now approaching the goal of all ambitious coders - natural language. Google is developing the facility to 'remember' what you were looking for the last time you used a certain search term. It then uses an algorithm (like neural networking) to 'remember' what happened the last time you used that word, contextualises it, and modifies its search in a way that fits your usual use of that 'word' or search term, bringing you a result that more closely matches your usual 'interests'.

But 'seek and find' intelligently is only half the story. A little known fact of the development of IT (Information Technology) in the 90s was the growth of "Data Warehouses". Few people, outside of big corporations and a few researchers, realise that 'Data Warehousing' and "Data Mining" is the biggest growing sector of the IT industry.



Data Mining is used mainly for market research. The data bought is far more sophisticated than the 'customer lists' bought and sold by telemarketers. Very few of them would actually contain the 'personal information, like names, addresses and telephone numbers. But with big enough data bases, and enough 'intelligent' cross referencing some disturbingly accurate individual profiles can be created.

Data Warehousing, as well as advertising, accounts for the extraordinary success of Facebook. If one looks at the fine print of the 'terms of use' when you sign on to Facebook, you will see that Facebook 'owns' everything you put up there, including 'backup copies' (supposedly in case you remove your Facebook account and then change your mind).

As Tom Hodgkinson, the author of a Guardian article about Facebook pointed out: "The creators of the site need do very little bar fiddle with the programme. In the main, they simply sit back and watch as millions of Facebook addicts voluntarily upload their ID details, photographs and lists of their favourite consumer objects. Once in receipt of this vast database of human beings, Facebook then simply has to sell the information back to advertisers."

Another of the 'terms of service' when you sign on to Facebook is that: "Facebook may also collect information about you from other sources, such as newspapers, blogs, instant messaging services, and other users of the Facebook service through the operation of the service (eg, photo tags) ..."

Privacy protection is sketchy at the very best: ie: Facebook "may share account or other information when we believe it is necessary..."

Facebook is estimated to be worth over 15 billion dollars to its owner, Thiel. Microsoft recently bought a 1.6 percent share of it for US\$240 million. Thiel is an ultra-conservative neoliberal with interests in genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and new technologies.

As I have said before, malevolence does not come from the machines, but from the 'minds' behind them. And it is not always safe to assume that commercial interests are invariably benevolent.

Net Neutrality

by Jay Stephens

What is net neutrality? If you are an internet user, it's something you already benefit from, and probably something you take for granted.

Under the hood, the internet is a vast network of networks, sitting on top of many layers of other networks: Networks of media ownership, networks of copper cable and satellite uplinks, local networks of powerful servers providing content, legal networks traversed when data crosses state and international borders, network gatekeepers that decide which "protocols" to allow (for example a Skype call, a web page request, or an MP3 download by torrent).

The apparent seamlessness when you do any of these things on the internet is an illusion. In many ways, deep down, the thing is an ugly kludge. But it works, and the resulting web is a beautiful thing, and already many of us take it for granted. We shouldn't. It relies on universities and TAFEs, government bodies, and profit-hungry multinationals all continuing to play by the rules (and with each other).

Net neutrality means you can connect any application you like to the web (Skype, that torrent downloader for your MP3s, even IE if you're desperate). It also means you can surf to any other computer, anywhere in the world, and view and download the content it hosts. Your ISP may limit your internet bandwidth usage, but until you hit that limit, you're a free agent.

For now. The big content providers (such as Mr Murdoch's NineMSN) don't like how little time we spend on their sites, and they have a plan to fix that "problem".

It's a genius plan - simple, like all the best ideas. Instead of limiting your bandwidth (the amount of data you use per month), ISPs intend to switch to limiting the areas of the internet that can be accessed - offering packages very similar to Sky subscriptions.

And you can bet that the package offering "full, unrestricted web access to all sites" will be the platinum one equivalent to today's "uncapped" access (currently around \$120 per month). Those of us who can't afford that will be stuck in the ghetto reading recycled Fox News on NineMSN.

The benefits (to the content providers with ISP cross-ownership, not to you or me) will be immediate - suddenly, only money making

Internet connection
Blocktastic?
BitTorrent transfers
Slowtastic?

Welcome to a world
without Net Neutrality.

("monetized") websites will be accessible to most subscribers, and their connections and bandwidth won't be getting used up by those awkward people reading "political" blogs or using the web as an organising tool.

Meanwhile their ad revenue will be way up, due to the hits from people with nowhere else to go. And think of the kids - if that's the package mum and dad have got, to them, those sites will be the "internet".

If this billing model becomes accepted practice, it will allow the "gatekeepers" to slowly strangle the content providers who are not in it for the money. The changeover to billing for area access rather than bandwidth limit is planned to take place over the next few years.

Right now, there's still time - not all of this may happen, but that depends on people speaking up and refusing to buy these products when they're offered. It will come piecemeal, and it will be as sneaky as Telstra already are (see bit.ly/telstra) - often you won't even know that a service is being denied to you by your ISP, because they'll make it appear that your connection is broken or the website is down.

Comcast in the US have been caught doing this already - if the user visits a banned URL, Comcast's systems "tell the uploading computer that some sort of error has developed in the connection" (bit.ly/fake404) - and this happens even if the user has not reached their download limit!

There are several groups worried about how this will pan out. For more background, check out Athene's video at bit.ly/netneutrality (broadband required), or check out the excellent American campaign at www.savetheinternet.com.

ALL SORRY NO SUBSTANCE

When Kevin Rudd said sorry
It was a sorry day
For all he said was sorry
He had no more to say
He said no word of recompense
Of the debt they have to pay
All he said was sorry
On that sorry sorry day
All he said was sorry
I never heard him say
Things were going to change
In any useful way
All he said was sorry
He said it with real feeling
But a Bill of Human Rights

Would really help the healing
All he said was sorry
And he thought he'd hit the heights
We don't need a sorry day
We need a bill of rights
Every day's a sorry day
All Australians say
To live without real freedom
In the land we love today
So Kevin show you are sorry
And you've seen the light
Draft a Bill and pass it
And start to make things right

Geoff Mullins



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