

NATIONAL CONGRESS of women



Day Two — Weaving How can we work together across difference to restore climate balance?

28 April 2022 (online)

Morning conversation

Weaving Women — Opportunities to redefine power

Report by Laurann Yen

Moderator: Assoc Professor Sara C Motta (Newcastle Business School, Politics and International Relations; Convenor, Women in the New Economy Hub, New Economy Network Australia)

Short presentations

Dr Janet Salisbury (science communicator, business woman, Founder of WCC)

Karen Cain (former CEO La Trobe Valley Authority)

Cristina Talacko (President, Coalition for Conservation)

Laurann Yen and Alex Marsden (public policy and governance analysts)

Kirsten Anker (lawyer and mediation practitioner, founding member of WCC)

Keynote presentation

Rhian Williams (independent dispute systems design practitioner)

The theme for the morning of Day Two of the National Climate Congress took up from Day One's theme- Women Rising, to explore how to re-define power and what opportunities exist to do it. If we keep doing things the same way, we will get the same result, and we need to shift our thinking and our actions to work together to restore our climate balance, for our planet's future. We need to look at power differently and to work differently, weaving our ideas, concerns and actions together to change our trajectory from climate disaster to climate balance.

Re-defining power

Barbara Baikie, founding member of the Women's Climate Congress, introduced the session, talking about the importance of re-thinking what power looks like, with its traditionally exclusive winner-takes all image to recognising, and including, the power of the voices, qualities and concerns of women in the deliberations about how to restore the climate balance.

She introduced the moderator for the session, Assoc Professor Sara Motta from the University of Newcastle. Sara says she “has worked for over two decades with raced and feminised kin and community in struggle resistances/re-existencias in, against and beyond heteronormative capitalist-coloniality in Europe, Latin America and Australia and co-created numerous decolonising and feminist projects of radical healing, ecologies of intimacy and community wellbeing.” Across the course of the morning Sara provided links between the speakers, drawing out core messages; the importance of being attentive, of listening deeply; of validating different perspectives, particularly of women, of First Nations people and of others who are rarely seen, heard or acknowledged in the seats of power, but whose work underpins the creative and caring love for the earth and its peoples. What does it mean, asked Sara, to “reimagine forms of leadership in the feminine, and in an intersectional sense of the feminine, so not a form that erases the other, but that builds on the possibilities of richness through learning about each other's stories and knowledges.”

Each of the morning speakers are working on opportunities that re-define power and lead to increasing the potential to collaborate across the divide.

Following in the footsteps of the 1915 International Congress of Women

WCC Founder Janet Salisbury reminded us that the first imperative stemming from the IPCC Code Red is to stabilise the climate by 2030. If this fails, we are basically done for, but if we can meet this challenge, the longer-term goal of the WCC is to make systemic changes to the way we govern ourselves, and look after the planet to create conditions for a sustainable and regenerative future.

Janet reiterated that WCC has proposed an independently mediated process to bring together representative groups with diverse affiliations, interests, expertise and perspectives to agree national priorities and actions to address climate risk. The opportunity here is to build community support — moving from individual representations to collaborative problem solving. Work has been ongoing through Covid, through multiple Zoom meetings with politicians and others to explore potential openings for this approach.

The WCC has also started to draft a ‘Women’s Charter for Change’ (working title) taking some of our style and pattern from the 1915 Congress and our content from monthly Zoom conversations with guest speakers, membership conversations, first people's knowledge of women and men's business and their understanding of the first law of Mother Earth, and our reciprocal duties of love and care for the earth. Work continues, giving voice to recommendations relating to both immediate and longer-term actions.

Sarah loved the seriousness of the Congress in governance and recognised the innovation in redefining institutions, and leadership for and with women.

All voices need to be heard

Karen Cain led her community, the Latrobe Valley in Victoria, through the closure of the coal fired power stations. To do it well, there needed to be a transformation in the way decisions were made. “If people don't change these systems, we end up with the same systems that have created the situation we've got at the moment”. Away from decisions being taken at a distance by those ‘in power’ the future plans for the Latrobe Valley relied on a careful

engagement with people at every point in the community, working respectfully and reciprocally, creating a safe place to express ideas and hopes and fears, and testing possibilities. Karen stressed the importance of having a process that enabled all voices to be heard, and all voices carefully listened to, in building an outcome that did not just focus on individual or organisational outcomes but which truly reflected a community benefit. How, she asked, do decision makers find and include the “immediate mid-term and long-term issues that matter really matter to people. Like really matter. How do we know what matters to people without having that conversation?”

Conventionally, the power in regional areas is seen as the domain of middle-aged men in senior industry and government roles, or indeed in the community. The opportunity in undertaking this transformative process of seeking out and involving all voices has resulted in a fundamentally different process and outcome. Karen says “based on the work that we've done over the last five years... we are influencing policy change, and the way that government operates, and why policies (are) being developed”.

Bringing conservation back into conservatism

Cristina Talacko heads up the centre right group, Coalition for Conservation, among her many roles in the climate space and in business. C4C “is quite a different organization from lots of other environmental organizations, because we are quite focused in shifting the Conservatives and changing their mindset”. C4C aims to engage the conservative voice nationally and internationally in action on decarbonisation and conservation and as part of the transformative process took a group of seven Liberal and National MPs to attend COP26.

C4C arranged a program of meetings and conversations with other conservative thinkers from around the world, giving our local politicians a deep immersion in the views and approaches of colleagues around the world, and fast-track learning leading to significant changes in understanding and attitude to the key issues. At the same time C4C took hold of the opportunity to host a global summit attended by a number of countries— the US and Canada, European and Asian countries, to learn and listen and share both at the conference, and into the future.

Cris talked about the crucial importance of creating and sustaining safe spaces where trusted voices are able to bring in new ideas and possibilities to inform and change attitudes and thinking. This is extended by the education opportunities C4C provides for our local parliamentarians to understand better the science behind what is happening, and what our leaders can engage in to restore the climate balance. “It's not a something that will happen today. It's happening in a process. But we're seeing very positive outcomes. And we want to influence and experience, influence all of these MPs in a positive way, rather than through fear and negative experiences. So our long-term scenario here is to inspire them and bring knowledge and create this United commitment and a group of really good climate champions for Australia. It's an ambitious plan, but we're doing it.”

Finding and working from shared values across the divide

Sara outlined an experience she had had working with a colleague whose political leanings were very different to her own and said how important she had found it to work with someone whose values and ethics were so like her own, despite the political differences.

Finding the points of common interest and shared value enables people from across the divides to meet and address problems together. As with Karen's discussion, all voices need to be heard or the fabric of the action will be piecemeal and incomplete. Getting down to issues that matter, and are tangible both Cris and Sara agreed was essential for reaching a common understanding.

Womens Caucus on Climate- weaving our wisdom across our differences

Alex Marsden and Laurann Yen presented a different opportunity for reaching across the divide and re-defining power in their work to encourage the parliamentary women to establish a Women's Caucus for climate action in the next parliament. The rationale behind the idea lies in finding a way to create, as earlier speakers have said, that safe space where ideas can be explored and tested and where voices from all sides of politics, Liberal, Labor, Nationals, Greens and the Independents have value and are heard. Opportunities are then available for that thinking to seed the deliberations in the main party rooms, and for alliances and collaboration to occur around restoring the balance in our climate. The research they have done has identified a range of areas where collaborative action is possible- where the problem is agreed, but what is not agreed is the action. The research undertaken shows that there are Women's Caucuses in many parliaments, but so far, none which have been set up to form a collaborative and respectful space specifically around climate change action. Given Australia's potential to lead the world in decarbonisation with our rich renewable capacity, establishing a core role for women across the many political differences that exist would give strength to the work of policy and legislation to take us into the mid- and long- term agenda.

To date, local politicians have been approached and are interested- and in the next parliament we have the opportunity to align the collaborative effort for a powerful future.

Neighbourly Conversations

Kirsten Anker, also a founding member of the Women's Climate Congress, spoke about the development of 'enabling conversations' which can operate at a local level to allow shared values, shared concerns and shared solutions to be uncovered; and in doing so, create the faith and trust in potential collaboration. Kirsten said: " It's a project that appeals strongly to me because it, it ticks a number of boxes: it's about having honest conversations; it's about creating an environment where people may change their perspective; it's an invitation to improve community communication — amongst women working together on this issue, but also, between politicians and constituents — and it models a way of talking about difficult topics in in a meaningful way.

Neighbourly conversations are facilitated discussions beginning with two politicians from neighbouring electorates of different political parties. Then we add women from both electorates of diverse political views and participants from Women's Climate Congress. The Chatham House Rule applies to keep a safe space for people to talk freely and as equals". Having trialled this process suggests that it will be a useful path to follow to encourage collaboration around issues that need a unifying voice, along with the opportunity for politicians and constituents to come together equally and respectfully on complex issues of importance.

Weaving wisdoms across the divide — the role of a transformative process in bringing us together!

Speaker: Rhian Williams

After a morning break, Rhian Williams, a dispute systems design practitioner, gave a longer talk providing the underlying principles that have underpinned the WCC proposal for an independently mediated process to develop a national plan for action on climate change. Rhian's work focuses on supporting governments and others to transition from adversarial to collaborative dispute resolution mechanisms. Her work centres on projects that extend the capacity of individuals and communities in creating partnerships to support dialogue and mutual problem solving.

Rhian noted that often even when people are on the same side, in this case around climate change, they don't necessarily get together to work out their shared position. Without that preparation, they will be atomised and separate. One of the keys to solution finding is to bring out the 'wisdom of everyone'. Rhian spoke of the importance of hearing all participants and the absolute necessity of hearing each voice to put everyone on the same playing field and to honour each voice as valuable and included. If we continue to use the same systems, we will get the same solutions that have delivered us the problems we are in. To break from this, deep listening is crucial as earlier speakers have said.

Rhian provided an analysis of current consultation models, referencing Susan Carpenter's book *Managing public policy disputes*. She pointed out the ineffective approaches often taken — with so-called 'consultation' being done by sending out a paper on Friday before a long weekend with a short turn-around time for comment with no dialogue, no conversation about the agenda setting or about the process, no opportunity for those consulted to meet with each other and take part in what Carpenter calls a sequence of 'communal decision making'. Instead, the decision is made by the central authority running the consultation. This standard consultation process has been called a 'Solomon's trap' and it creates impotence, mistrust, and unhappiness with the outcome.

Rhian proposes that a good process would bring the stakeholders together. In a government policy decision, for example, good process would "recognize the importance of government as the convener of the process, but not the director or the leader of the process, and not the director and the determiner of what will emerge from that. The stakeholders are actually brought into relationship with each other, and they share that information with each other. And this means instead of only one central point hearing each piece of information, all that information is heard by everyone, which means that the weaving, if you like, is done by all of the stakeholders involved. All are working together and everyone gets to hear what's being said. All those threads are being drawn together by each stakeholder who's participating. They're all working together to develop a pattern." The answers are woven together by all the stakeholders.

Rhian summed up the discussion for the morning, referring back to key themes from the earlier speakers:-

- that preparation is essential
- that we must listen deeply and carefully, hearing the wisdom of all the voices]

- that we must be brave enough to change systems and processes — if we keep working the same way, we'll keep getting the same results — we need a new way, and we need to be brave and stand up for the future.