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# THE AGE



PUBLISHED IN MELBOURNE SINCE 1854

MONDAY, JANUARY 8, 2007

theage.com.au \$1.40

## The girl who fell to Earth



**THE SURVIVOR**  
PART 1

These two friends were living the free-spirited life of youth, taking their first skydive when their plane

hurtled to the ground. For one, it would be the last act in her life as she and five others died. In the first of a five-part series **Dan Silkstone** tells how **Kimberley Dear** survived.



Kim Dear (right) and her friend Vicki Delacroix posed for this photo before their ill-fated skydiving flight in the Twin Otter (far right), which nosed-dived minutes after take-off.



SHE wakes in white sheets on the other side of the world, the blood of the dead drying in her hair. She cannot move. Her spine is smashed, pelvis and collarbone broken, knee dislocated and head marinating in the dull, queasy throb of concussion. For the next 16 days she will barely move. She will not shower or shampoo, wash the blood from her hair, although the smell turns her stomach. When she finally does, the water will run red down the drain.

And when she opens her mouth, she asks the same question, over and over. "Where's Vicki? Where's Vicki?" Kimberley Dear is front-page news on three continents but she does not know that yet. Nine tonnes of aeroplane and eight human beings have fallen out of the sky. The pictures are spectacular — the Twin Otter crumpled nose-first into hard summer ground. Reporters camp outside the hospital, hungry for word of her condition.

It is July 29. Mel Gibson has drunk himself into disgrace and thousands flee as Israel pounds Beirut. In America's Midwest, a skydiving trip goes wrong. Six are dead and a seventh fights for life, paraplegic and in a coma. Somehow, the eighth member of the party — a young woman from Melbourne's outer western suburbs — survives. Her blue eyes dart but her head is fixed still. Pain swamps comprehension, but slowly it comes. And when the nurse puts a phone to her lips she mumbles

six words — carried across oceans to a kitchen in Sydneyham. "Daddy, the plane crashed. Please come." The papers called her a miracle survivor, but Kimberley Dear's family is not interested in miracles; the story they tell is about people. It is about their daughter's bravery but also about what others have done, the strangers who have saved her life, pulled her from the wreckage and nursed her back to health. It is the story of a young woman, who wanted only

to be normal, struggling to deal with an event that is extraordinary. About how hard it is to get on with life when your life is defined by a single event. Most of all, it is about the one question that everybody asks. The one that amnesia still prevents her from answering: What is it like to survive a plane crash? Saturday was hot. As Sunnyhill Camp awoke to begin the rituals of communal life, the Missouri summer sun was already gaining strength. By mid-afternoon it would be

35 degrees. The sky was clear and the wind gentle: perfect conditions for skydiving. Kim did not think about it as she showered in the outside amenities block, but she had already taken the jump of her life. There she was in the heart of the American Midwest, the first in her family to leave Australia and hoping to figure out if there might be more to the world than what she had seen so far. It had brought her to Sunnyhill, a summer camp for adults with physical and mental

disabilities. A place that promises "an experience you never forget". She is 21. Compact, but not tiny, with a brown ponytail and a good-kid type of cheeky confidence. A broad Australian accent and chatty enthusiasm mean you always know she is in the room. And she is a big smile — a world-eating grin that she wears like a default setting. Normal is her favourite word. She likes "normal" music and

▶ Continued NEWS 4

## Ex-NAB boss in legal battle

By **JULIA MEDEW**

FORMER NAB boss Frank Cicutto and his wife Christine have been accused of destroying and tampering with evidence in an upcoming compensation battle over their \$8 million Canterbury mansion, which they claim is a lemon. In documents tendered to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, lawyers for Melbourne builders Backman & Company Pty Ltd allege the businessman disposed of diaries in which he wrote "assiduous" notes about the building of his luxury Monomeath Avenue home.

They also claim Mrs Cicutto perjurously concealed entries in her personal diaries and withheld information that was relevant to the long-running legal battle. Mr Cicutto, who received a \$14 million payout when he quit as NAB chief in 2004, is seeking \$380,000 to fix his chateau-style house, which he and his wife claim is plagued with deficiencies.

The couple say poor building work has left them with a noisy timber first floor, loud flushing toilets, rattling chandeliers, damaged marble floors, an inadequate stormwater drainage system, a stained fence and an unfinished letter box.

They also claim that they can hear dripping noises in pipes from their bed in the master bedroom. The dispute began when Backman & Company, which signed a \$2.29 million deal to build the house in 2003, took Mrs Cicutto to VCAT in 2005 claiming they were owed more than \$200,000 for work, including \$33,000 for a home cinema and \$13,000 to install American oak front doors. The legal action prompted a counter-claim from Mrs Cicutto last year, scheduled for a 25-day-long hearing in April — one of the longest disputes to go before the tribunal.

But the protracted building war has escalated in recent months with allegations of perjury and professional misconduct against the Cicuttos and their lawyers at DLA Phillips Fox. In a letter written last month to the Cicuttos' lawyers, David Fairweather for Backman & Company accused Mrs Cicutto of tampering with evidence that may help the builder's case. "Regrettably, your client has under pain of perjury masked entries which are clearly relevant," the letter said. "In addition, your client has failed to discover her original diary for 2003 which was the period for construction of the dwelling... We are very concerned that our client is being deprived evidence vital to its case," Mr Fairweather wrote. The accusation followed earlier correspondence from Mr Fairweather threatening to employ a handwriting expert to test the authenticity of Mrs Cicutto's diary entries, which he suspected had been altered.

▶ Continued NEWS 2

### WEATHER

Melbourne Fine after early drizzle. Morning cloud clearing to mostly sunny afternoon. **Top 22**  
**Tomorrow Fine 27**  
**Wednesday Fine 36**  
**Thursday Fine 31**  
**Friday Showers 30**  
▶ Details NEWS 18

### ODD SPOT

Black tape is being stuck on public servants' desks in England's northeast to show them where to put their keyboards and pens — at a cost of £7 million (\$A17 million). Union officials slammed consultant Unipart's expensive efficiency drive as madness and added: "It's demoralising and demeaning."

ISSN 0312-6307



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## Tracker to help Victorians go green

By **LIZ MINCHIN**  
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

VICTORIANS can now regularly track their ongoing contributions to climate change, with the launch of a world-first weekly indicator showing the state's key sources of greenhouse gas emissions. The indicator, an initiative of the Climate Group, an independent non-profit organisation, will be published exclusively in *The Age* every Monday. While most countries release annual greenhouse gas data, the indicator will allow Victorians for the first time to see how much their use of coal-fired electricity, petroleum and natural gas is adding to the state's growing greenhouse emissions. As today's indicator shows, in the first week of 2007 Victorians

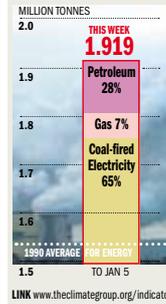
produced 1.919 million tonnes of greenhouse gases from their energy consumption, a jump of 25 per cent from the same period in 1990. The emissions jumped late in the week, as the hot weather prompted people to use more electricity. The Climate Group was founded in London in 2004 and is now also based in New York, California and Melbourne. Its Australian director, Rupert Posner, said the idea for a weekly greenhouse indicator was prompted by a speech by Victorian Environment Minister John Thwaites at a Climate Group event. "John Thwaites was saying that in the same way that there's regular information coming out about water levels in our dams, people needed to see regular

information about our greenhouse gas emissions," Mr Posner said. "Environmental consultant and Channel Seven weatherman Rob Gell and I thought it sounded like a good idea, so we decided to see how it could be done." About 85 per cent of Victoria's greenhouse emissions come from energy use, which is growing rapidly. The rest comes largely from agriculture, industry and waste, but is more difficult to account for on a weekly basis. The weekly figure is calculated using detailed market data from the National Electricity Market Management Company, VENCorp and the federal Industry Department. The Climate Group converts data on electricity, petroleum and

natural gas into greenhouse emissions, using methods accepted by the Australian Greenhouse Office and others. Some of Melbourne's leading climate and energy experts volunteered to help create the indicator, including CSIRO climate, weather and ocean prediction team leader Chris Mitchell, RMIT University adjunct professor Alan Pears, Mr Gell and the Department of Sustainability and Environment's executive director of sustainability policy, Ian Porter. Dr Mitchell, the former head of a national centre for greenhouse accounting, said the energy sector was well monitored, meaning people could trust that the weekly figures were "very robust".

▶ Continued NEWS 6

### THE WEEKLY GREENHOUSE GAS INDICATOR



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
 ■ Victorians' energy use produced 1.919 million tonnes of emissions last week.  
 ■ This was about 25% more than the 1990 weekly energy average.  
 ■ Energy is the source of about 85% of total Victorian emissions; other sources include agriculture, waste and industrial processes.

**INSIDE NEWS 6**  
 ■ Climate and water  
**OPINION**  
 ■ Editorial NEWS 10  
 ■ Rupert Posner: At last, a weekly report NEWS 11

LINK www.theclimategroup.org/indicator

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# Melbourne Weekly

Fairfax Community Network

A guide to gastronomic  
**INDULGENCE**

**HOLIDAY**  
Free-for-all for kids



# carbon puzzle

Is carbon offsetting an environmental cure, or just smoke and mirrors?

# carbon clouds

Is carbon offsetting paving the way for a greener planet, or is this new industry just a lot of hot air?  
Andrew Fenton investigates

Carbon offsetting company Climate Friendly makes a bold, yet simple claim on its website: “In five minutes and for the cost of a cappuccino a week, you can go climate neutral.” The service it provides is straightforward: the company estimates the number of tonnes an individual or business emits and then “offsets” them by investing in a renewable energy project to prevent an equivalent number of tonnes from being spewed into the atmosphere.

Australia has at least 10 other carbon offsetters including GreenFleet and ElemenTree, which plant trees to soak up carbon, and Carbon Neutral and Climate Positive, which provide a mixture of renewable energy offsets and sequestration-using trees. Large energy companies such as Origin also provide carbon offsets.

Proponents claim that offsets enable people to take responsibility for their own emissions. But is paying a few dollars a week for carbon credits a realistic solution to climate change? Or does it simply allow customers to assuage their guilt, without doing anything to change their environmentally destructive habits?

The dark green fringe of the environmental movement unkindly likens it to “giving money to the RSPCA so you can keep kicking your dog”. While it may be an unfair comparison, there are legitimate questions being asked about this fledgling industry. Is it even possible to accurately estimate the amount of carbon emissions a person or entity is responsible for? And does the purchase of a one-tonne carbon offset really end up keeping a tonne of carbon in the ground or sequestered in a forest?

**The carbon market**, worth up to \$22 billion a year worldwide, remains relatively small in Australia because trading is voluntary, apart from a state-based scheme in New South Wales. Until an emission trading system is implemented, it

will remain so. Given the sector’s lofty aim is to save the planet, you could be forgiven for thinking that carbon off-setters are all charities, but half are commercial enterprises.

Joel Fleming, the managing director of Climate Friendly, can certainly see the silver lining in every carbon cloud.

“This is a new marketplace we’re creating,” he explains. “It’s an eight billion tonne per annum market – or opportunity – in terms of our pollution.” Since starting business in 2004, Climate Friendly has already secured the likes of Westpac, Colliers International and the Ethical Investments Association as clients. Sales trebled in the aftermath of Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* last year and the subsequent release of the Stern Report and our severe drought has ensured sales have stayed high.

About \$6 out of every \$10 is invested in saving the planet, while the other \$4 goes to overheads and profit.

“The other part goes to all of the necessary services that basically convert a raw carbon credit into a retail product that people can actually buy,” Fleming says.

Climate Friendly uses an online calculator to estimate an individual’s emissions. Given a carbon offsetting company makes higher profits if it estimates higher emissions surely there’s at least potential for a conflict of interest? But Fleming says the company uses internationally accepted methodology and besides: “We don’t need to encourage anyone to pollute more to create business for ourselves because the world is doing it flat out anyway.”

Climate Friendly is highly regarded by organisations – including the Australian Conservation Foundation and WWF – but the voluntary offsets sector is unregulated and some argue it lacks transparency. This is not helped by the wide variation in results from online

emissions calculators. For example, the online calculators of the UK’s Carbon Neutral and Grow a Forest both estimate a return trip from Melbourne to London is responsible for about 3.7 tonnes of carbon emissions.

But Climate Positive calculates it to be 8.4 tonnes, Climate Friendly estimates 10.04 tonnes and Carbon Neutral (Australia) puts it at 11.49 tonnes. With a one-tonne offset costing about \$20 to \$25, the differences start to add up.

**Part of the problem** is the assumptions the designers of the calculators have to make: for example, the emissions per person on a half-full flight to London are twice those of the emissions per person on a fully booked flight. “If the plane was empty, we have no way of knowing that,” explains Fleming.

Assumptions about the type of plane, cargo load and the effect of emissions at altitude all have a bearing on the outcome.

Climate Friendly is one of just three companies in the world that has Gold Standard offsets, an accreditation process supported by 40 NGOs including the David Suzuki Foundation and WWF. This may be why the Australian WWF so enthusiastically endorses Climate Friendly on its website and in interviews, but the arrangement is also set to become more than “just friends”.

“We are thinking about the possibility of making some donation to WWF’s climate change campaign from every tonne of carbon credits we sell,” says Fleming.

Voluntary carbon offsets are bought and sold thanks to a complicated mixture of idealism and guilt, and nowhere is this more evident than in the niche travel companies aimed at the more enlightened end of the overseas tourism market. Every time a traveller takes an overseas flight, they’re helping to destroy the world they love. Air travel contributes about 3.5 per cent of the world’s





emissions and it pumps them out much higher in the atmosphere, which has an exponentially greater effect.

Melbourne's most famous carbon neutral convert is Darrell Wade, chief executive officer of Intrepid Travel in Fitzroy.

He describes sitting under an acacia tree in the Kalahari desert in Botswana one afternoon in June last year, reading Tim Flannery's *The Weather Makers*, a light breeze rustling the canopy above. An elephant wandered by.

"It was f---ing fantastic," Wade says. He had an epiphany. "I thought 'I'm in an industry which is actively contributing to the problem and not only am I working in it but as the CEO I'm driving growth in the business and promoting people getting in planes'," he says.

"Ultimately, aviation and long-haul travel isn't responsible so what are we going to do about it?"

Given the obvious solution – closing his travel business – wasn't an option, Wade decided to prepare a three-year plan for the company to go carbon neutral.

"What that means is the net activities of our company, not just aviation, but every aspect of running our company will have zero effect on the world's carbon emissions."

The total cost is yet to be ascertained but he says it will be substantial. "It will be six figures, it could be seven figures."

Customers are also paying more from January 1 every Intrepid ticket to Europe has had a \$181 surcharge added to cover the cost of an offset.

Peter Miller, managing director of No Roads Expeditions in Cheltenham is also in the process of offsetting the emissions caused by his business and he says all travel companies should do the same.

"We're actually really bad polluters even though we love the environment," he says.

While Miller intends to offset everything from his customers' domestic flights and travel within other countries to the emissions caused by their accommodation, he'll leave it to individual travellers to decide if they want to offset their own international flights.

They'll be strongly encouraged to add the cost of the offset to their total bill but its opt-in at this stage.

Miller says this allows travellers to take responsibility for their own emissions.

"We live in such a cocooned society, you flip a switch and a light comes on but we've no idea of the



Darrell Wade: Holiday epiphany

processes behind it or the damage that it causes. This way we're actually making people aware they are polluters and they actually have a footprint on the planet."

**No Roads** Expeditions has partnered with Climate Positive, an offset company based at the Eastern Treatment Plant in Carrum that launched just a few weeks ago. Climate Positive is a non-profit offshoot of Australian Ecosystems, a commercial outfit that's been re-vegetating native bushland for most of the past decade.

Climate Positive's online emissions calculator is the only one that includes diet.

This is significant because livestock emits methane, which is 23 times more potent as a heat trapping gas than carbon.

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates livestock accounts for 18 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas problem.

But Climate Positive's real selling point is its "ecological dividend".

You pay the company \$25 for a verified one tonne offset of carbon through renewable energy projects, and the company then offsets another 0.3 tonnes by revegetating deforested areas with a high carbon yield.

"You're getting extra," explains founder Brendan Condon. "That's how you become climate positive."

Sixty to 70 per cent of the funds that Climate Positive generates will go into renewable energy projects, a percentage will pay for education programs and overheads and the remainder will pay for revegetation work in the Strzelecki Ranges in Gippsland, by Australian Ecosystems.

Condon says his aim is to



Peter Miller: Committed to cause

encourage people to reduce their own emissions, rather than simply offset them.

"We don't want it to be seen as a mini-licence to pollute by subscribers," he says.

"The only real answer to this incredibly dangerous phenomenon that's emerging is to reduce our carbon dioxide output.

"It doesn't matter how you try and cleverly offset carbon, we've got to radically reduce emissions."

Although Condon doesn't go into it, Climate Positive's focus on providing an "ecological dividend" of trees, rather than tree planting solely to offset emissions, is neatly in line with current thinking on the subject. Put simply, while everyone agrees planting trees and revegetating forests has many benefits, green groups – including Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and WWF – have distanced themselves from their use as carbon sinks.

"There's not a problem with trees per se, but as offsets they're



STEPHEN MCKENZIE

**"We're actually really bad polluters even though we love the environment"**



STEPHEN MCKENZIE

Brendan Condon: 'We need to radically reduce emissions'

inherently uncertain and risky," explains Anna Reynolds, the deputy director of the WWF Global Climate Change Program.

"The methodology for understanding how much carbon a tree has absorbed is pretty complex and the carbon that's stored in vegetation is unstable in that it's vulnerable to the trees dying or burning in a bushfire."

The instability of trees was starkly demonstrated throughout December when tens of millions of tonnes of carbon went up in smoke during the bushfires.

This risk to carbon sinks will increase with the Australia Institute recently forecasting an increase in the frequency and ferocity of bushfires because of – you guessed it – climate change.

**Planting trees** to mitigate climate change also requires an enormous amount of space.

According to Reynolds, the estimated three tonnes of carbon sequestered in an average hectare of forest is dwarfed by the 10 million or so tonnes the average coal-fired power station pumps out each year. That's roughly 3.3 million hectares of forest that need to be planted per year, per power station.

Cambridge University botanist Oliver Rackham memorably dismissed the whole idea saying: "Telling people to plant trees (to solve climate change) is like telling them to drink more water to keep down rising sea levels."

Reynolds says that carbon offsets should support renewable energy.

"A renewable energy project is something that can really start generating change in the way we produce energy," she says.

"If you're investing in renewable energy technologies you're investing in the future."

Probably the easiest way to invest in renewable energy is to hook up to the government accredited Green Power, and Victorians are doing so in droves.

More than 20,000 Victorians signed up in the three months to September 2006 and we now account for more than 40 per cent of the 345,000 Green Power customers nationally.

But in the end, does it really matter if individuals and businesses buy Green Power and offset their carbon emissions?

Compared to the millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases spewing into the atmosphere every day, surely it's an insignificant and ultimately futile gesture?

Not according to Wade. "One of the things that kind of gives me the s\*\*\*s at the moment is people almost throw it to the Government and say: 'Government – fix it for us, solve it for us'. I think you've actually got to take more personal responsibility. Sure governments should be doing a bit, no question, however companies should be doing things, individuals should be doing things. Everyone has to do whatever they can in their own sphere of influence." **mwm**