

healthy cities in the global green movement

Ariane Lewis speaks to Carol Berry about why she thinks Wollongong needs to vote Green in this year's Federal Election

As the global environmental movement picks up, local green issues are also gaining momentum and the focus of such issues will be represented by Illawarra Greens Cunningham candidate, Carol Berry at this year's Federal election.

Twenty-five year old Berry, born and raised in the Blue Mountains and a resident of Wollongong since 1994 sees green issues as part of a political awareness the local community needs to develop. Understanding green issues, and working with them progressively is fundamental to the sustainability of this country's long term future.

Essentially it comes down to a question of values. The Greens believe we have to stop prioritising the financial worth of activities over their social and environmental worth.

"People should be given a greater choice over the way development occurs in their region," Berry explains. "Too often people with major financial interests get the ear of those in power.

"I do not believe in imposing decisions on people as I think there has to be real consultation in long term sustainable development plans. If the Greens were elected at a Federal level they would seek this change and challenge the status quo in terms of decision making."

Cunningham has been a safe Labor seat for a long time and current member Stephen Martin isn't immediately equated with progressive environmental change. Picking up new voters in this year's Federal election would mean sending a clear message out to Australia's politicians that people are thinking and developing a green conscience. It will be a challenge in itself but one Berry sees as essential to maintain a sustainable future.

"The ALP are not a party any more," She explains. "They have become a machine. This in effect means your representative ALP member is unlikely to participate, or form policies, in real way contrary to the direction already planned for the party. This has caused the ALP to become insular and stagnate.

"The Greens hold a global focus in their perspective of environmental and social justice activists. The ability for the ALP to blossom in future will be dependent on a major shake up."

As this election campaign starts to kick off, economics will soon take hold of policies, campaign rhetoric and political reasoning. As is the case with elections across the world the economy falls first and foremost and as

the mainstream political parties talk double speak on election core and non-core promises, the Greens, according to Berry, emphasise economics as part of the general social well being of our world.

"It is irresponsible not to have a stand on economics given the current political landscape," She explains. "I'm a strong believer in economic justice and I think that the current division between rich and poor is something that cannot be sustained either socially or economically.

"It is appalling that the top ten percent of the nation's wealthiest own 50% of the assets and the bottom ten per cent own nothing at all. It makes a mockery of our egalitarian aims as a nation. The GST is a regressive taxation policy and I find it unfortunate Liberal and Labor are not supporters of true principles of economic justice.

"Essentially it comes down to a question of values. The Greens believe we have to stop prioritising the financial worth of activities over their social and environmental worth. The values have swung towards an economic focus as opposed to community focussed as our leaders sell policies to us.

"I am a strong advocate for taxation and redirecting wealth to those who are economically disadvantaged. I think, however, if Australia is to keep its strong quality of life in the future there are other aspects of life we must consider."

These other aspects form the majority of Green principles and policies. Locally they concern the over development of our natural resources, the quality of air we breathe and most specifically, for Berry, the level of representation citizens have in the decision making process.

"I think our communities need to become healthier in two fundamental ways. In terms of

people's participation in decision making and empowerment in the political process, as well as the physical health of people. This is very important down here because of such serious industrial pollution, which is an issue that absolutely stirs my heart. The blatant disregard residents' health and the way the PKC decision was rushed through by the Carr Government is appalling. This is an excellent example of that way I would like to see the world change.

"The essential rights of people across the nation are being challenged and this is the primary reason I am running. The equitable access of health care and education is on the brink of being lost. The primary aim of a community is to ensure the average Australian has to access these things in the future."

For Carol Berry, getting elected in Cunningham is about urging Australians to realise the danger of complacency in the mainstream political parties and how such an attitude filters through to local politics.

"I think the ALP is firmly committed to being elected and the Liberal party is firmly committed to being re-elected. The cynicism and lack of respect for the average Australian not to realise that is their primary aim is an insult.

"I believe in democracy and I think the principles in democracy are being eroded in the two party system. There most certainly needs to be more women in parliament and it is so irritating to have decisions affecting women's lives being made by men. I am firmly committed to my principles and I would rather shoot myself than become relaxed and comfortable in my position. I think this Federal election is a very good opportunity for Australians to send a message to the major parties."

