

## PROFILE

# A time for change

For 20 years, environmental activist Rowan Huxtable has been spreading the word on climate change and, he tells LOUISE TURK, he thinks people are finally ready to listen.

Rowan Huxtable is a contemplative man, absorbed by serious issues about the planet's future.

His big picture approach often leaves him frustrated by the short-sightedness of others.

Long before Al Gore and his *An Inconvenient Truth* put global warming at the forefront of collective consciousness, Huxtable was issuing warnings, about to whoever would listen, about the dangers of climate change.

Now, as consumers fret about rising fuel prices and housing affordability, Huxtable believes population growth and resource consumption are issues that demand our attention.

Yet it's not always easy, as Huxtable acknowledges, getting the masses to see the forest through the trees.

"I think people are starting to become aware of climate change," the Mangerton community activist says.

"Yet I don't think that people are really aware of the growth issue and the constraints that we are going to run into. It hasn't hit the radar that population growth and the resource use growth that is happening is not going to continue. It's going to limit itself in some way or another.

"People talk about petrol

prices going up and complain about the role of the government and oil companies yet I don't think there is a general understanding that petrol resources are going to run out. We are still building cities and houses that depend on a non-renewable resource.

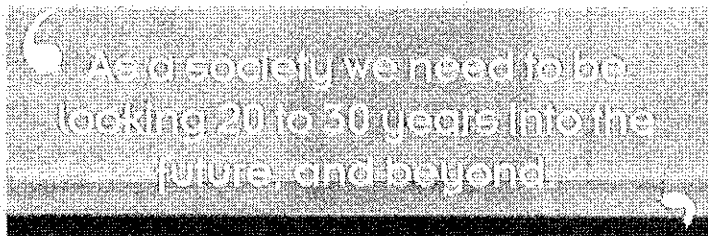
"We are seeing the same problem with other finite resources such as land and water. In respect of housing prices, governments can't make land. They can choose to build

and the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

"Just to keep emissions at the same level, let alone reduce them, emissions per capita have got to drop and the more the growth continues the more acute the resource constraints are going to be," he says.

Ecological sustainability worries Huxtable. The concern about how today's development needs will affect future generations is particularly troubling for Huxtable when he contemplates his hometown.

"I think about the future a lot when I'm sitting out at North Beach or South Beach," he says. "People in Wollongong can mosey on up to the beach, have a beautiful stroll or swim, enjoy the open space and mosey on back home.



more houses over land that used to produce crops or food. They can choose to sell off national parks and public land and put houses on them.

"But ultimately the more people that are trying to live in a city the higher the real price of land is going to be."

Huxtable ponders the relationship between Australia's predicted population increase

"What are my boys going to be able to do? I have that thought a lot. As a society we need to be looking 20 to 30 years into the future, and beyond, and try and set ourselves up to cope and provide the next generations with a reasonable quality of life."

In addition to individuals and collectives conserving energy and using green energy when

possible, Huxtable believes the key to reducing our ecological footprint is education and lobbying for change.

Huxtable was a founding member of the Wollongong Climate Action Network in 2006, a group whose aims include effecting "political influence at all levels of government to take action on climate change" and putting climate change on business and community group agendas. He is also a member of the Greens political party.

"We think it's important to do individual things - you can change your own lifestyle," he says. "But it's also important to exert community influence and political influence."

Huxtable, who is acutely aware of the apathy of many towards environmental issues, is optimistic the message of ecological sustainability will eventually get through.

"I think society attitudes do change," he says. "Even looking back to Australia when I was a kid, attitudes about various things have changed quite a lot since then.

"The economy is geared to churning out resources and growth and there's a lot of employment in industries that support this. So it's a question of changing over the years and modifying who the main employers are, and what the main industries are, and that takes time but it has happened. People used to be employed in Australia chopping down cedar trees."

Huxtable, a BlueScope Steel engineer, became concerned about global warming in 1987 after attending a conference on the subject. He stresses his interest in climate change is personal and not related to his professional work at the steelworks.

"Even at that stage, scientists were fairly confident it was happening," he says. "I was just generally interested in what this century was going to be like because there's such a huge population growth predicted. There's climate change and resource shortages and I just think there are a lot of changes we should make to prepare for those things."

Huxtable, and his son Liam, 17, were part of a group of Wollongong and Melbourne friends that walked to K2 Base Camp in Pakistan last July.

While the holiday presented many memorable moments for Huxtable, he was concerned about the carbon footprint left by his air travel. So, when he got home, Huxtable took measures to offset the carbon emissions produced on his flight.

"In the end, it was the reason we got the Prius," he says.

Huxtable and wife Theresa try to limit their driving and travel in the hybrid car when necessary. Huxtable cycles to work. Around the house, they have installed photovoltaic cells (that generate electricity when exposed to sunlight), a rainwater tank and energy-efficient lighting and he cuts his grass with a handmower.

Mangerton community activist Rowan Huxtable wants future generations to enjoy natural resources like the beach.

Picture: DAVE TEASE

