



Steve Posselt is GM of water infrastructure firm Watergates, was the convener of Ozwater 2005 and is a man on a climate change mission.

Kayak4Earth: a climate change mission

This man on a mission believes climate change will see us up the proverbial creek without a paddle if we don't do something about it soon.

For the past year I have thought and read about little other than global warming, water and the Darling basin. I have been through the stages of realisation that the situation is far more serious and immediate than first thought, through the despair that can accompany such concentrated focus, and am now out the other side to hope.

Hope that we have finally realised what we have been doing. Hope that people can tie in the forcings of global warming with the effects. Hope that we are prepared to do what is necessary.

In May, I will set out from Brisbane in my kayak and head for Adelaide. Up the Brisbane and Bremmer Rivers, overland to Toowoomba and then following from the eastern source of the Darling River all the way to the sea at the mouth of the Murray. Then it is out to sea around the corner and up to Adelaide. On the way, I will pass via Cubbie station and through a host of towns dependent on the Murray-Darling system for survival.

There are forums planned along the way to discuss global warming, the resultant climate change, the likely effect on our rainfall and water availability and the causes of it all. Unlike the paddle, the communication is not just one way. I will be filming locals, talking about what they think, what they have seen, what they hope for the future.

And I will have a message: we had better look after what we have got because the chances are that water will get less, rather than more. It will be an unpopular message in some places. Take the Chinchilla area, for instance. The place is struggling. There is not enough water to go round and people's lives are severely affected. For them, there is a lot of coal under the ground and to dig it up means wealth, just like it does for a lot of the rest of Queensland and NSW.

According to the Stern report though, on average one tonne of CO₂ causes \$110 damage. Every tonne of coal extracted brings in about \$80 and when burnt creates three tonnes of CO₂, thus causing \$330 of environ-

“ We had better look after what we have got because the chances are that water will get less, rather than more. It will be an unpopular message in some places. ”



Brisbane to Adelaide in a kayak to highlight climate change.

mental damage. Is it therefore reasonable to say that for every dollar someone earns from coal will cost someone, somewhere, sometime, four dollars? I believe so.

An eight-year-old's insight

As an engineer, the problem of no water on the way was just a matter of design. For four years I have been paddling and walking my wheeled kayak to work. Of course a one-and-a-half hour paddle and walk twice a day is somewhat less than a trip from Brisbane to Adelaide, but the principle is the same. I'm confident in my design and have done trials both in rivers and rough seas.

John Nielsen, a retired kayak adventurer down the inland rivers of NSW provides some inspiration in this excerpt from his pen: "I thought about the old aborigine who said if the river stopped flowing, all the land would die, and so the condition of the rivers continued to haunt me. I remembered what the river looked like in 1935 and again in 1993 and tried to imagine what it would look like in 2035. My eight-year-old grandson provided the answer; he gave me a drawing of a little boy paddling a kayak on the river. And the kayak had wheels on it!

"How do we bring the plight of the rivers to the notice of people? How can we get the relevant authorities to take action, which will eventually bring our rivers back so my grandson can take the wheels off his kayak? You tell me."

In July last year, I cartwheeled my motorcycle in soft sand on the Plenty Highway near Alice Springs. I was lucky, I lived. But I decided that one way or another I was going to make my life count. This is the start.

FACT FILE Why 'clean coal' is a con

I don't believe in 'clean coal'. It is an oxymoron, something that coal miners, governments and anyone profiting from coal would like to believe. The simple facts are that for each cubic metre of coal that is burnt, 5m³ of liquid CO₂ will be produced. To collect it, the coal must be burnt in pure oxygen, it must be condensed to a liquid by using significant amounts of energy and it must be buried deep underground. For how long is this five into one sustainable?

More at www.kayak4earth.com