

Extinction Rebellion and “irresponsible behaviour”

I wish to challenge Ian McAuley’s throwaway comment about the “irresponsible behaviour of Extinction Rebellion” in his weekly round-up of Sat 23rd March. I realise he was using it to illustrate a different point – not writing a detailed critique of Extinction Rebellion. But I’d suggest that most readers of his round-up – intelligent progressives – will have their dismissive view of Extinction Rebellion reinforced by that line.

I’m a sometime XR activist in Melbourne. I also have a full-time job, as a public hospital doctor, which means I can’t do anything of a seriously illegal nature. (I have however been arrested, handcuffed and thrown into a divvy van when pasting a poster about one of the big bank’s continuing funding of fossil fuel projects on the front window of its Melbourne head office!).

During XR’s recent “Rebel 4 Life” week, I took part in two actions:

- creation of a [video outside the NGV](#);
- a colourful protest on the steps of the Victorian Parliament, alerting the public to the imminent catastrophe of Seismic Blasting in the Southern Ocean, off the western Victorian coast. (For more information about this outrageous project, see Timothy Erik Ström’s *Arena* article [Blasted sea: a fossil fuel cacophony in Bass Strait](#).)

On both occasions, the Police (including the Public Order Response Team!) outnumbered the activists; there were no arrests; and there was no media coverage. Whereas Violet Coco, Brad Homewood and Joe Zammit’s blocking of the Westgate Bridge has garnered massive media coverage, including a marvellous Golding cartoon in Melbourne’s *Age*. reproduced below with his permission.



There is always serious discussion and careful evaluation within XR of all its protest actions. My own preference is for disruptive, and at times illegal (non-violent) actions targeting Fossil Fuel interests and their supine political enablers. But I'm very sympathetic to the overall thrust of XR. I'm acutely conscious of how motivated the XR activists are to shake the public up to realise that we are facing a truly existential crisis, yet our leaders are failing us disastrously.

This week, the Senate Communications and Environment Legislation Committee will hand down a report which is widely expected to recommend that Senator David Pocock's "Duty of Care" bill (inspired by Anjali Sharma and her team of young climate activists) not proceed for debate in the senate. (Here is the [inquiry webpage](#) and here is an explanation by the ANU Institute for Climate, Energy & Disaster Solutions: [What is the Duty of Care Bill?](#)).

If you haven't watched the Committee's Day of hearings into the proposed bill, I recommend you do (available on [ParlView](#)). It was clear from the start that the chair, Labor Senator Karen Grogan, had already decided, on behalf of Labor, to reject it. Liberal Senator Hollie Hughes was more sneering and unpleasant than I could have believed. There were almost 400 submissions to that inquiry (including mine); the IPA's was against; all the rest were in favour. Experts from a variety of fields gave evidence to the effect that the proposed legislation is both workable and necessary.

It breaks my heart that Anjali Sharma, at the age of 19, has given so much of herself to this cause, but to no avail.

That, I'm afraid, is the impotence of responsible, non-disruptive action!!!

I really do think the epithet "irresponsible" applies far more to the Fossil Fuel robber barons, their amoral financiers, and their corrupted government enablers!

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I am happy to receive comments to "ribarnino" at a gmail.com address