

COMPASSION & RESPECT: THE DALAI LAMA TALKS ENVIRONMENT

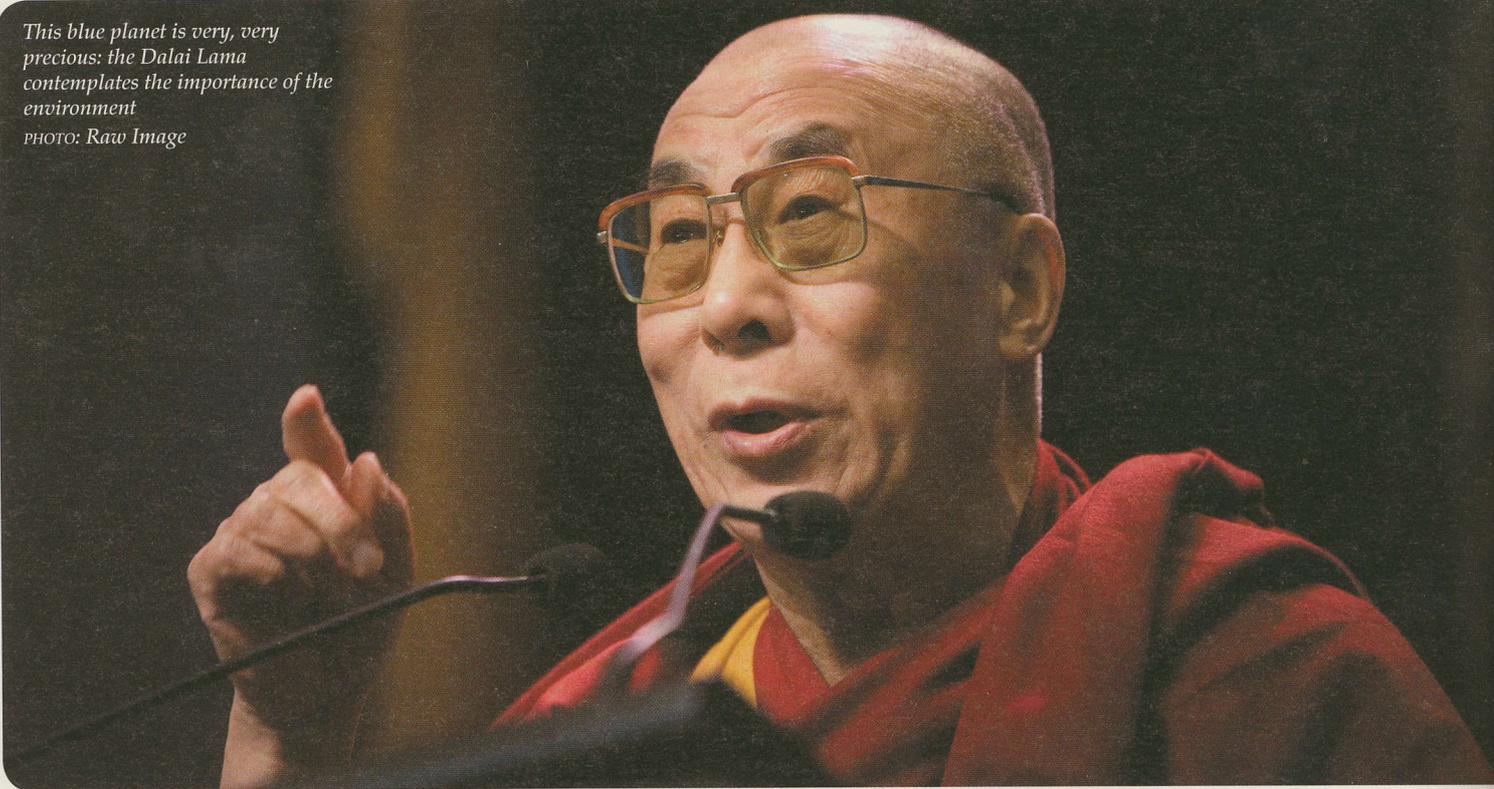
During his recent Australian visit, His Holiness the Dalai Lama spoke to ACF supporters about his concerns for the environment, his optimism for the future, and why they hold the key to positive change.

MARGARET AMBROSE



This blue planet is very, very precious: the Dalai Lama contemplates the importance of the environment

PHOTO: Raw Image



THE SPIRITUAL LEADER of Tibet and Buddhists worldwide and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the 14th Dalai Lama, is cracking himself up. Chuckling to himself, he is speaking at a crowded Burswood Dome in Perth about respect.

It started off seriously enough. "Compassion," boomed the Dalai Lama, in a voice strong for his 71 years. "It means taking care of other beings. It means compassion for all species of the mother. Including insects." The Dalai Lama paused as the diverse crowd of school students, hippies, monks and families nodded solemnly in unison.

Then he shrugs. "Although perhaps mosquitoes that carry malaria may be an exception. Or bad monks. When you are having a very deep sleep and a bad monk comes and wakes you." The Dalai Lama can barely contain his giggling and the crowd erupts into laughter.

"Sometimes," says the Dalai Lama with

mock seriousness. "You have to take a strong position."

The humour and warmth – and trademark giggling – that has made the Dalai Lama an object of love and respect by millions of people of all religions worldwide, is there, but His Holiness has come to Australia to preach a serious message. And at his first public event, a forum hosted in conjunction with ACF, the Dalai Lama is talking about the environment.

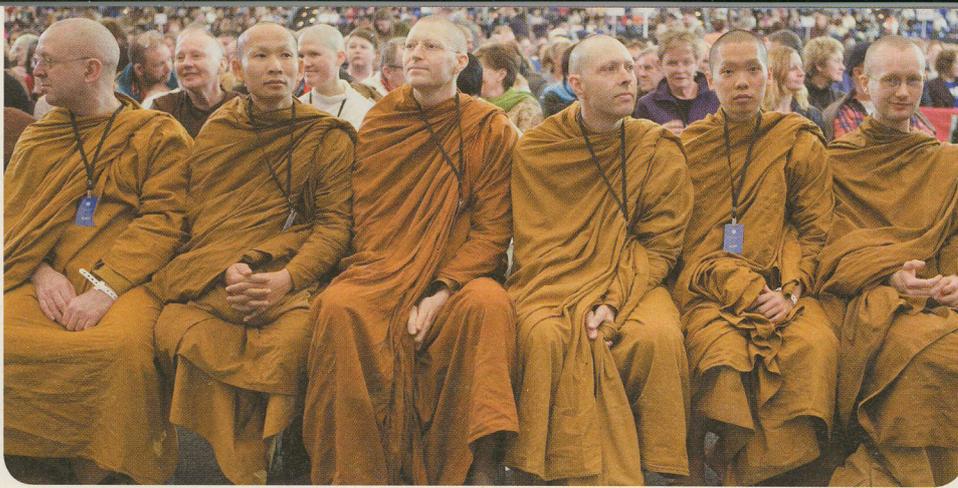
The Dalai Lama was billed as the main speaker at the Spirituality and Sustainability Forum, along with ACF President Professor Ian Lowe, Brett Godfrey, CEO of Virgin Blue Business Group, and Anna Rose, founder of the Australian Youth Climate Coalition, and hosted by landscape architect, horticulturalist and TV personality Jamie Durie. But it soon turned out that His Holiness did not want to simply be the

keynote speaker – he wanted to be part of the forum.

Brett Godfrey spoke first and delivered a rousing speech on the role of business in addressing climate change. Professor Lowe, who launched into a discussion of the science of climate change, followed him. "A government report four years ago concluded that we can reduce our energy use by 30 per cent by using existing cost effective technology," Professor Lowe told the crowd. "And Several European countries now have a target of reducing their energy use by -"

Suddenly Jamie Durie, who had emerged from backstage, interrupted Professor Lowe.

"Professor," said Durie. "If I can just interrupt you for one moment. It seems we have a guest who would like to join us on stage. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would like to come and sit with us for the remainder of your speech."



Buddhist monks in the auditorium await the arrival of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

PHOTO: Raw Image



"The present generation have a moral responsibility to protect the resources for the next generation."



The crowd sprang to their feet and erupted into applause that lasted several minutes, until in fact, the Dalai Lama indicated that they be seated. In a gesture illustrative of the humility of the monk, the Dalai Lama refused the couch seat that had been set out for him, opting instead to stand at the lectern with the other speakers.

Professor Lowe, with a calmness that revealed no unnerving by the turn of events, smiled, said "What a lovely surprise", and continued with his talk.

The Dalai Lama listened intently to Ian Lowe and then Anna Rose, and he says, they were a source of inspiration. "It really gives me hope and a feeling the future is not bad," he says. "Because the present generation, particularly those [of the] younger generation, when they look at environment issues seriously and implement what they are feeling, their ideas, in acts, I think that things certainly can change."

Environmental conservation is not a topic that the Dalai Lama has focussed on much in the past, and he admits that, as a young Tibetan monk, he was not even aware of the issues. "When we were in Tibet we had no idea about the ecology." Things changed for the man who describes himself as "one simple Buddhist monk" in 1959 when the Chinese seized Tibet and

"In each and every moment, keep in your minds the preservation of energy and our resources."



the Dalai Lama fled to India, where he now lives in exile. (China had unofficially annexed Tibet in 1950, just months after India had gained independence, in what historians believe was a preemptive grab for the land separating the two Asian super-powers.)

"Through the media we heard from specialists in ecology and scientists and I felt personally really that this was so important. The survival of entire living beings on this earth really is very much an environment issue.

"Earth, from the stars, in the empty space, from a distance, looks beautiful," he continues. "But on this planet there are a lot of man-made problems. Unnecessary problems. But despite these problems, there is no other home we can live in. So, whether we like it or not, we have to take serious care of this planet.

"I think this blue planet is very, very precious."

The Dalai Lama firmly believes that it is every individual's responsibility to reduce their impact on the environment and to build more sustainable societies. "You have to take care of resources for future generations!" he says. "It is absolutely wrong to consume all the resources so coming generations will face miserable lives. We have a moral responsibility

to keep sufficient resources for future generations."

And His Holiness reveals that even he has made some changes. "I have made a small personal contribution!" he laughs with delight. "Since many years I have never taken a bath in a tub! I only shower!"

And he adds, "And when I leave a room I always put off the lights!"

"Care for the environment should be part of our lives," His Holiness continues, in seriousness. "Using cars, living in the city, using water, in each and every moment, keep in your minds preservation of energy and our resources."

Although water and energy are his key concerns, the Dalai Lama cites the rise of consumerism as particularly concerning. Happiness, he explains, comes from contentment, not the acquisition of things.

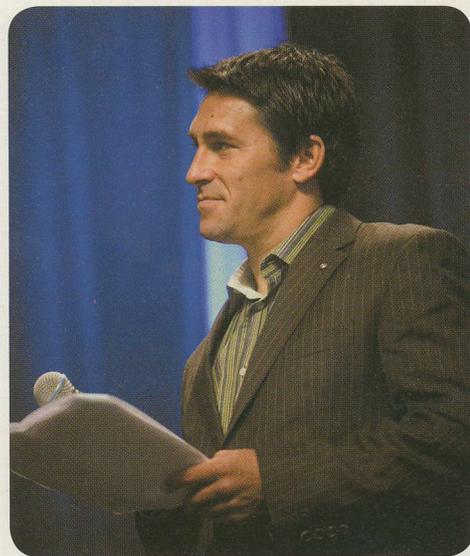
"It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor," he says. "If you have plenty of food, plenty of money, plenty of dress, plenty of rings—" His Holiness hold out his arms and strokes his hand as though displaying jewels (chuckling along the way, of course). "There may be a very high price for these things – gold and diamond rings – but you only have ten fingers! You can't just keep consuming!"

He adds seriously. "The pursuit of contentment, it doesn't come from clothes or money."

The Dalai Lama also applauds efforts of ACF supporters who go beyond personal change and who lobby government and business with the message of sustainability. "You people who are activists, you constantly remind people that we should take care of the environment. It is very important."

Whilst some might consider it incongruous for a Buddhist monk to be discussing sustainability, the Dalai Lama argues that care for the environment is entirely in keeping with his philosophies - the relinquishment of the illusion of control and the one-ness of all living things, for instance.

"Sometimes science and technology give us false hope, false confidence, that we can



FAR LEFT: Jamie Durie introduces His Holiness
PHOTO: Raw Image

LEFT: ACF Executive Director Don Henry with His Holiness
PHOTO: Raw Image

BELOW: His Holiness listens to Ian Lowe's speech
PHOTO: Raw Image

control nature. Of course we can control a hall - we can control the temperature. But the whole planet, we cannot control. We are part of it. All living things are linked. It's important to know that we are part of nature.

"Everything is interdependent. That concept really helps us to take an holistic view of the environment. That concept really gives us a clearer picture of this challenge."

For the Dalai Lama, the ACF event in Perth was the first stop on his mission to spread the word about kindness, compassion and sustainability. "Sometimes people leave it too late. Therefore we need education. It is important for the environment."

He returned to an environmental theme while addressing a crowd of 10,000 at a free public lecture in Melbourne. He described climate change as a "great challenge for humanity" and said a global response was needed.

Whilst in Australia, His Holiness visited cities in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria, speaking to thousands of people. Leaving the Burswood Dome in Perth, though, the overwhelming response of the audience indicates that his message will not go unheeded.

Tania Wilson, an online producer from Melbourne, travelled across the Nullarbor to hear the Dalai Lama, and says that the take-home message to her was not just spiritual. "What the Dalai Lama said about the environment really made sense to me," she says. "Caring about the environment is all about personal responsibility and respect for all living things, be they other people, animals, or nature. He has inspired me to think about my own actions and the way I live and I am really excited about the changes I am going to make."

Changing people's attitudes towards their own impact on the environment may be a huge task, but the Dalai Lama is confident he is up for the task. "If you remain a compassionate person, honest and truthful, you will always have inner strength and contentment."

