

# Tragic.

*The ABC toe the Corporate Line and Ignore the Obvious.*

Having dropped the word “Report” from their title, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's nightly news-journalism half-hour is now somewhat awkwardly named just “7:30.” This numerical title flags a new tone of pragmatism, impatient with the unquantifiable, as well as a new reluctance to specify the nature of its presentations as necessarily investigative journalism, as implied in the word “report.” This brings the News service of the ABC more closely in line with its identity as a *Corporation* among Corporations, in contrast to the *Commission* it once was. A “Commission” is an independent service charged by the government to tell the truth to the people without bias. This charter has now been replaced with the role of a corporate publicity business, the ABC thereby beginning to look like not so much the Public Relations Department of any one corporation, but rather an entire corporation devoted to being the Public Relations Corporation for the corporate world as a whole.

7:30's recent “report” on geothermal energy generation in Australia epitomised this new paradigm. The presentation was focussed solely upon generating stations in remote outback mining towns (Mount Isa, Innaminka), and utterly ignored the situation in Victoria, where the leases for the two prime geothermal sites, situated about 100kms either side of Melbourne (one near Angelsea, the other near Lake's Entrance, both close to existing electricity grid infrastructure), were obtained by a company formed by board-members of two companies in the oil and uranium industries (Rum Jungle Uranium Mines and Lakes Oil NL) in 2004 (i.e. Greearth Energy Ptd Ltd, who were not mentioned). The tone of the presentation toward geothermal energy was dismissive throughout, and the “conclusion” drawn was that geothermal “promises much but delivers little,” because the development of geothermal energy is not able to “attract investment.” This “observation” was deliberately cast in the passive voice. And this is where the presentation stopped short of actual investigative journalism. 7:30's mystification was nothing but the propagation of the opinion which the powerful fossil-fuel lobby wants propagated. Oh no, it's not that the development of geothermal has been actively prevented by the oil and uranium industries; oh no, no, it just “fails” to “attract investment” - a “fact” left inexplicable, somehow implying that there is something inherently deficient in the technology itself. Meanwhile Fukushima spews out ever more radiation into the Pacific Ocean, although it's hard to know exactly how much, as the ABC don't report that at all, but instead offer us Dr Zygmunt Switkowski telling us to build nuclear power plants and forget geothermal, which is at best a vague future possibility. So much for the objectivity of science.

This disparaging presentation was then followed later in the program by a presentation indirectly promoting the oil and gas industry, by showing footage of rare deep-sea fish which had been filmed thanks to oil companies donating the use of their specialised ultra-deep-sea submarines to marine biologists. Funny how we never saw those submarines when the Deep-Water Horizon catastrophe was happening in the Gulf of Mexico. No mention either of the fracking planned all over Australia – that's rock-fracturing gas mining, which pumps a cocktail of toxic solvents (including nail polish remover and dry-cleaning fluid) down into the earth at pressures high enough to split granite, inevitably contaminating the ground-water. This insane and needless mining practice has already decimated huge swathes of the USA with literally hundreds of thousands of toxic wells abandoned after extraction (Gasland is a *must*-see documentary), which in many cases actually made the ground-water flammable, poisoning the soil, and posing a massive health risk to both animals and humans. And the American and European Oil and Gas companies want to do this damage to our country for *their* financial benefit, not ours. And the ABC is funded by our tax dollars to tell us this.

The subtext of the 7:30 program was subtle, but clear enough: geothermal is an impractical dream of idealists, whereas oil and gas companies are good guys supporting scientific research out of the generosity of their hearts. The propagation of this opinion was the main aim of the show, which can in no way be described as investigative journalism, but as corporate propaganda. The observation that geothermal has “failed to attract” investment is the point at which an investigative report would have *commenced*, not concluded. The real question is why the mining industry and the state and federal governments have not promoted the geothermal option? The answer is, because the oil and uranium industries know very well that geothermally generated electricity could quickly and easily replace fossil-fuel power generation, putting them largely out of business. They would not have bothered acquiring the geothermal rights otherwise. The fact of the matter is that the Oil, Gas and Uranium industries do not want a working model of Geothermal's potential in existence, because it would demonstrate the possibility of an endless supply of 100% clean power, thereby putting them out of business. The only way to break this deadlock is to make the public aware that it is well within our powers to have cheap clean electricity for everyone – Gina Reinhardt could make it happen tomorrow by writing a few cheques that wouldn't even put that great a dent in her bank balance. But power blinds.

So it's not so bad after all that the ABC has slashed its Arts department, for instead it is bringing us real-life Tragedy. It has gouged its own eyes out rather than look directly at the facts, and made sure no-one knows that we are complicit in the problem, when we could be part of the solution – namely, that we are using our powers to make nothing but weapons of mass destruction, when we could so easily be pioneering the problem-solving technology of tomorrow, and catapulting our humble little country to the forefront in the world of renewable energy-technology, with solar and wind for remote locations, and geothermal for industrial and urban requirements.

American militarism and consumerism have led that great country to the brink of both environmental and economic collapse. It's often said that we here in Australia are a decade or two “behind” America, which is usually interpreted to be a bad thing. But it's a good thing to be “behind” a train-wreck, and to be able to change direction before we hurtle off the same cliff. Wake up, Aunty. Look in to the story that you're only half telling, and let the people know the truth about what is being prevented. We here and now in Victoria have the possibility to show Geothermal's potential. But have we got the brains to see what a fantastic opportunity this is, and to take it? Or will we sit down, roll over, and beg for scraps from a handful of multinationals who we let run the country from a distance?