



Why don't people get it?

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As a psychologist and activist I'm often asked how to explain to others that serious and urgent climate action is needed now. As in: Why don't people get it?

So much is at stake and yet our government is unwilling to show leadership. The recent cuts to the funding of the Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) underscore their lack of urgency. They act as if we have time to take action later, rather than that we are running out of time.

One explanation is that if we heed warnings seriously, and realise we need to take action now, that would evoke feelings of alarm and fear, especially once we realise the same cannot be said of our government. So many protect themselves by not engaging, while those speaking out risk being labelled alarmist, or idealistic, or accused of trying to destroy our present lifestyle.

Thousands of climate aware people carry these labels. They have marched with banners, delivered petitions, staged sit-ins, and risked life and limb to climb trees and buildings to raise the alarm. They have urged people to switch away from banks supporting fossil fuel ventures, and to support renewable energy instead.

It's not fun, as activists carry the burden for those who can't bear to feel deeply about the issue, who won't recognise the urgency of the climate crisis or the scale of action needed. They can feel ignored, or abandoned by their community and government.

They can also feel deep grief about the failure of other citizens to play a role and hold our governments accountable. With time, that can lead to a mixture of anger, sadness and even despair, especially for young people. They realise the truth of the words of polar explorer Robert Swann that 'the greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it.'

Published in in Fairfax Regional Newspapers

November 2016