



[Raging Grannies join the 2014 Climate March](#) by [Doug Turetsky](#) | Flickr | CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

## The Elders Are Rebellng

Julian Cribb

There is a palpable wrath, out there in Elderland. The Elders, it seems, are no longer happy to look on as a bunch of corporates and their political stooges pillage the planet and lay waste to our grandkids' future. With growing resolve, resources and organisation, they are fighting back.

This isn't the 'grey power' that is commonly talked about before. For one thing, the focus isn't on themselves, their pensions and comforts – it's on their children and grandchildren and the damaged condition of the world and their own health that we are leaving them.

This isn't the revolt of the disempowered, the inarticulate or rust-belt unemployed that may – or may not – have been a factor in the rise of Trump and the Brexit campaign. It's bigger, and much more potent, than that – but just as disillusioned and angry with political inertia and the mess that corruption and laissez-faire economics are making of the future.

Currently there are around one billion people aged 60 and over worldwide, according to the UN. As life expectancy improves in developing countries this number is expected to double by the mid-century. In Europe, North America and Australasia, Elders will make up a quarter of the population and a third of the voters. They will live, and exert influence for up to 25 years or more beyond retirement. They are a cohort corporates and politicians ignore at their peril. The Elders are literate, experienced, time-rich, educated and enfranchised. Furthermore, they are overwhelmingly either parents or grandparents.

Politicians and corporate managers should tremble. How the Baby Boomers vote, buy, invest or disinvest rules the fate of governments and businesses around the world. If the Elders conclude your product or policy is harmful to their grandkids, they can inflict a lot of damage on shareholder value or political majorities.

The evidence for a politically active and engaged Elderhood is all over the internet, on Facebook, Twitter, Get-Up and Avaaz, and in retiree groups like U3A and SEE-Change, as wise and experienced minds contemplate the catastrophic mix of climate, extinction, toxic pollution, militarisation, resource scarcity, society-wide surveillance and resurgent authoritarianism in place of democracy.

Here's the thing: ethical Elders know their grandchildren are being handed a rough deal, a planet more damaged and dangerous, and a society less free, fair, safe, healthy and equal, than they themselves enjoyed. More and more, they are putting their voices, brains and financial power behind things like renewable energy, clean-up campaigns, political pressure for wildlife and landscape restoration, safer food, better healthcare, opposition to war and militarism, and a renewal of trust and investment in those pillars of modern society, education and science.

The phenomenon of the billionaire-turned-philanthropist is well known – after a lifetime of rapacious accumulation a deathbed (or thereabouts) crisis of conscience transforms the accumulator into a social benefactor. What's happening with the Elders is equally profound but far more significant, because it is occurring across a generation, not just a handful of individuals.

But don't take my word for it. Let the Elders speak for themselves:

**Ian Lowe, emeritus professor:** “My generation has lived a more comfortable and secure life than any of our predecessors, largely because of their prudent investments in our future. We are not returning the favour by providing for our descendants. On the contrary, we are allowing our politicians to fritter away our inheritance. I am incandescent with rage at their obsession with short-term trivia while global crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are accelerating.”

**Ian Dunlop, former oil and coal industry leader:** “Human-induced climate change is now determining the fate of humanity – yet self-serving politicians want to waste our money opening up the world's biggest coal province, despite the availability of clean, sustainable energy. Criminal irresponsibility, as billions may die in the escalating climate emergency. Stop mining coal - and get on with fixing the climate urgently.”

**Jenny Goldie, past president Sustainable Population Australia:** “In 1970, about the time of the first Earth Day, I read Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* and realised rapid human population growth lay at the heart of most environmental problems. Climate Change is now the overwhelming existential threat that requires an emergency response.”

**Jeremy Leggett, director of SolarCentury:** “I became active a quarter century ago as an act of rebellion over our collective stupidity. What inspires me is the hope I find in the recent achievements of the rebels, for example in solar killing coal. I still have hope that sanity will prevail.”

**Bob Douglas, emeritus professor:** “My unease began with the publication, over 30 years ago, of Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* and the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth*. I have watched the unfolding of the Climate Change saga, which has coincided with the arrival of my grandchildren. I am deeply concerned for their future and appalled at the failure of governments everywhere to take appropriate action. I am an activist because I am experienced enough in the way the world works, perhaps to be able to do something about it.”

**Trish Johnson, Psychologist:** “In the early 80's with 3 small children, I became deeply concerned at the potential for nuclear war on our planet. Now, I have 7 grandchildren and I ask why so many of the world's children live in poverty, want and terror while world leaders avoid facing the hard issues. For many years I have been active through Amnesty and many other organisations, as well as in non-violence training and conflict resolution. I am appalled at the short term thinking and plunder of our land and physical and human resources. Where is the vision, the leadership, the compassion, the vista of justice and sustainability?”

**Darryl Fallow, communications engineer:** “My father instilled in me as a child the need to leave the world in a better condition than we found it. There is a moral and ethical dimension to acting on climate change and, given the future implications if we fail to take sufficient action, I consider it a social justice issue.”

**Margaret Lee, retired librarian:** “As it became clear that the dangers of ‘global warming’ were real but were not being taken seriously by our governments, and I found myself grandmother to seven grandchildren who would bear the brunt of our inaction, I felt the need to do what I was able to do – adapt my lifestyle to minimise my carbon footprint. I joined organisations of people as concerned as I, to learn all I could about the issue and to try to influence our politicians. This is what I concentrate on.”

**Sue Wareham, retired medical practitioner, and (not retired) peace and anti-nuclear activist:** “War is an abomination. It has bred humanity's ultimate self-destruct mechanism, nuclear weapons, which threaten millions of people, like my grand-daughter. The struggle for sanity and survival must not be abandoned.”

**William D'Arcy, editor, Lethalheating:** “Should the Catholic Church be right and in the afterworld I meet up with my forebears, I shall have no answer when they ask, ‘How come you f\*\*\*ed it up?’”

From these comments, it can be seen that many Elders are girding their loins for a battle for the planet, for the future and for their descendants. They are not going to be silenced or

deterred. And politically, they are a far more numerous and powerful force than, say, the youthful, fervent but ill-organised and semi-articulate 'Occupy' movement.

Furthermore, thanks to the internet and social media, they are reaching out to one another around the planet and across former boundaries and barriers, sharing information, ideas and solutions. They are starting to think and act collectively at the worldwide scale. As a social movement, they have clout. Mega clout.

Combining wisdom, experience, resources and opportunity, The Elders are an emergent force for good on the global political, economic, social and environmental scene.

One that can truly change the World.

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