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CREATING A C-CHANGE?

This July bore witness to the biggest global media event of all time — and by far the largest climate awareness event in history.

Al Gore's Live Earth concerts for a climate in crisis took place over 24 hours on seven continents (thanks in part to the British Antarctic Survey's band Nunatak taking a break from field work!) and were watched by millions worldwide (with an unprecedented 10 million online).

With bands blaring from Sydney, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hamburg, London, Johannesburg, New York, Rio de Janeiro and the Antarctic, Live Earth urged viewers to make a personal commitment to combating climate change by signing up to a 'seven-point pledge'. The pledge identifies seven areas in which individuals can reduce their carbon footprint, such as being more climate-conscious when travelling, shopping or at home.

Going by the results of recent surveys, the awareness-raising at the heart of Live Earth is urgently needed. A public opinion survey by research company Ipsos Mori published in July found that, of over 2,000 adults interviewed, a small majority believes that climate change is too complex and uncertain for scientists to make useful forecasts, though most think that human activity does have a significant effect on climate. Another recent survey by the UK Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs reported that only half of 11- to 17-year-olds say they are worried about climate change and a mere 12% feel able to do something about it.

The Live Earth concerts and their participants have received no end of criticism for their carbon-intensive ways, with headline act Madonna singled out as a climate catastrophe, owing to her multiple houses, worldwide tours and portfolio of investments in carbon-heavy companies. Although this is a fair criticism, if you want people to listen to a call for change, punctuating it with Kasabian, Keane and the Red Hot Chili Peppers is not a bad approach.

Whether that means the concerts will instigate change is another question. As one of 60,000 at the Wembley gig, I couldn't help but notice how the enthusiastic roars from the crowd contrasted starkly with the sluggish retorts to calls for action. As they say, though, 'recognition is the first step to recovery'. It's going to take a lot more than a rock concert to change human behaviour, but the mainstream recognition that is signified by Live Earth suggests we are at least heading in the right direction.

OLIVE HEFFERNAN, NEWS EDITOR

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- 32 Chemistry**
Sugar power
Harvey Leifert
Biodiversity and ecosystems
Arctic response
Harvey Leifert
Extreme events
Dangerous hotspots
Samia Mantoura
Cryosphere
Ice-cold hotspots
Eric Smalley
- 33 Ocean science**
Carbon export overestimated
Eric Smalley
Climate impacts
Arctic ponds disappear
Samia Mantoura

NEWS FEATURES

- 34 Risky business:**
Altering the atmosphere
Hannah Hoag
- 36 Missing carbon mystery:**
Case solved?
Jane Burgermeister
- 38 Not as pure as snow**
Dan Whipple

BUSINESS FEATURE

- 40 The corporate race**
to cut carbon
Kurt Kleiner

NEWS & VIEWS

- 44 Chemical engineering:**
Hybrid routes to biofuels
Lanny D. Schmidt and
Paul J. Dauenhauer

AUTHORS

- 46 Making the Paper**
Andrew Yool
- 47 Making the Paper**
Kenneth L. Smith Jr