

# Greenhouse prefect

*Light-bulb moments from the likes of this former banker may be key to our future survival*

**B**uilding sustainable housing that can survive extreme weather is just one of eco warrior Mara Bun's good ideas. The 48-year-old former Wall Street banker and Greenpeace Australia chief financial officer is now trying to convince others of that in her role as CEO of Green Cross Australia.

"One of the big ideas that Green Cross has is that if every time we get hit by extreme weather we go back and build again the same way, guess what will happen?" Mara says. "After a disaster we have the opportunity to push the envelope with something more resilient and it can mitigate the risks as well."

The organisation's "build it back green" project enshrines those principles and you can read all about that on the rather fascinating website, which is a geek's paradise ([www.greencrossaustralia.org](http://www.greencrossaustralia.org)).

Mara will be spruiking this and other bright ideas at the biennial Ideas Festival at the State Library of Queensland from May 19-22 ([www.ideasfestival.com.au](http://www.ideasfestival.com.au)). Sustainability will be high on the agenda and that theme will be explored by participants including foodie Maggie Beer, comedian Rod Quantock, environmentalist Drew Hutton and the Hunter Gatherer Dinner Club founder Deb Newell.

Green Cross Australia, established in 2007, is also the result of a good idea, from former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Mr Gorbachev, now 80, is the founder and a director of the Geneva-based Green Cross International. He was on a roll after his biggest idea ever – dismantling the Soviet Union – going on to set up the sustainability NGO in 1993, after the ground-breaking Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

"He realised that what we needed was a Red Cross for the environment," Mara says.

"The imminent thing we were all terrified about – nuclear war – didn't happen, so he turned his mind to the next challenge."

Green Cross is now in 30 countries and the Australian arm works to empower people to respond to environmental change in ways that embrace community resilience and sustainability. The focus includes natural disasters and longer-term change such as rising sea levels and drought.

"We support practical action that inspires a values shift towards sustainability and resilience, working through social media," Mara says. "And we work on the ground with emergency volunteers, communities impacted by extreme weather events, and primary school students."

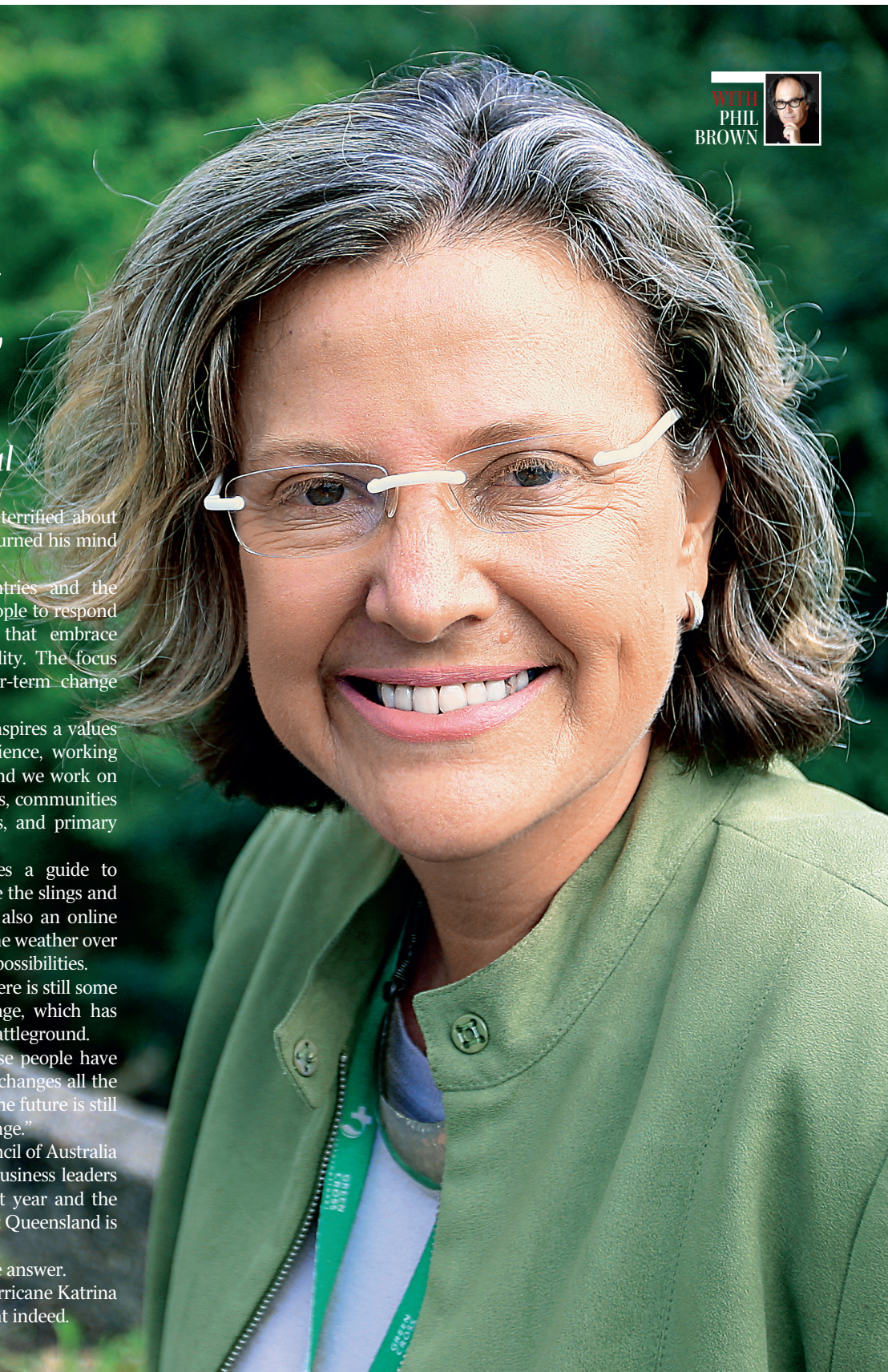
The Green Cross website includes a guide to building a sustainable house to survive the slings and arrows of extreme weather. There is also an online research project that charts our extreme weather over the past 150 years and projects future possibilities.

Mara understands, however, that there is still some public scepticism about climate change, which has become something of an ideological battleground.

"I get climate change denial because people have this notion about the weather, that it changes all the time, which it does," Mara says. "But the future is still uncertain and that's part of the challenge."

Green Cross and The Property Council of Australia organised a "hypothetical" event for business leaders at Parliament House in Canberra last year and the subject was: what happens if Southeast Queensland is directly hit by a category 4 cyclone?

"What was result?" I ask, fearing the answer. "Not good," Mara says. "It made Hurricane Katrina look like a cakewalk." Food for thought indeed.



PHOTOGRAPH Richard Waugh



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