

responsibilities of transnational corporations, and the alleviation of poverty — primarily by the creation, not redistribution, of wealth. Much of the debate was distorted by recriminations between rich and poor countries, and by self-interested US power-play tactics to minimise various international collaborative commitments. There was relatively little recognition of the damage that humankind is now doing to Earth's life-support systems, and its consequences for humans. Considerations of health in relation to ecological sustainability received little attention.

One positive, late-breaking development at Johannesburg was the commitment made by Russia and China to comply with the international Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, that initiative left Australia looking even more aberrant on this great modern environmental issue than it did before the Summit.

The topic of climate change and health will evolve rapidly during this decade. Researchers are increasingly coming to grips with this and related issues. The point of such research is to enrich the information base for farsighted decision-making. As Rene Dubos, the eminent microbiologist, might have said if he were alive today, "Think future, act now."

**Anthony J McMichael**

Director

**Rosalie E Woodruff**

PhD scholar

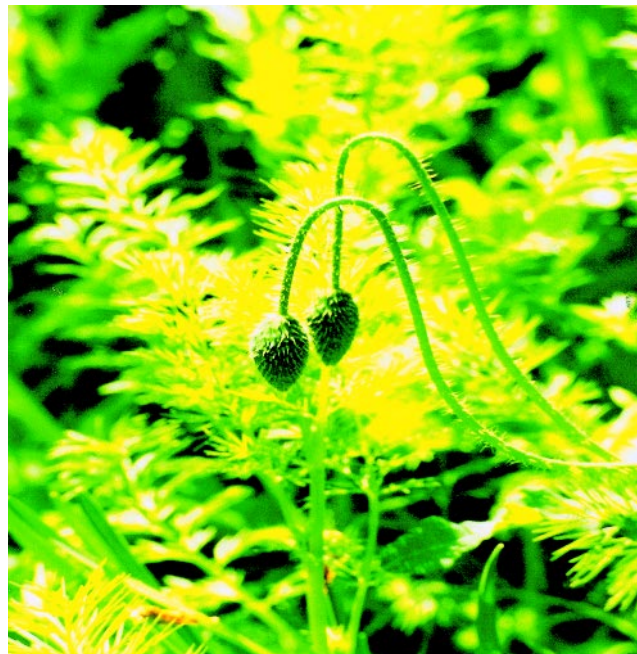
National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health

Australian National University, Canberra, ACT

tony.mcmichael@anu.edu.au

1. Albritton DL, Allen MR, Baede APM, et al. Climate change 2001: the scientific basis. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group I. Summary for policy makers. Third assessment report. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
2. Vitousek PM, Mooney HA, Lubchenco J, Melillo JM. Human domination of earth's ecosystems. *Science* 1997; 277: 494-499.
3. McMichael AJ. Human frontiers, environments and disease: past patterns, uncertain futures. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

## SNAPSHOT



### Papaver orchidiformis?

One of my poppy plants always sets its buds in pairs, with a stem formation reminiscent of some human anatomy. If its seedlings set true, I may have a new botanical variety: *Papaver orchidiformis*, var. *vasa deferentia*.

**Alan Moskwa**

General practitioner, Kensington Park, SA