**Teachers Mutual Bank**

**Podcast 3**

**Spending for the planet - supporting sustainable business practices**

Head of Socially Responsible Banking at Teachers Mutual Bank Corin Millais talks about green washing and how to bank for the planet. Corin is an internationally recognised sustainability and ESG (environmental, social and corporate governance) expert and an early champion of ethical business.

He has three decades of leadership experience across more than 40 countries and is a passionate leader focused on business transformation with profit-for-purpose.

He was recently named as the Green Leader of the Year in the 2023 Finder Green awards, awards that recognise sustainability champions across a range of industries with the aim of helping Australians find companies and products that lead the way for environmental sustainability.

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Investing in future generations is something those of us in the education sector are very familiar with. But sometimes it’s hard to understand what businesses are doing to look after the health and wellbeing of our planet and our communities.

Hi, I’m Virginia from the Department of Education and joining me is Corin Millais from Teachers Mutual Bank (TMB), to talk about how we, as consumers can hold businesses accountable for their practices.

Corin is head of socially responsible banking at TMB. He’s also an internationally recognised sustainability and ESG (environment, social and governmental) expert. An early champion of ethical business.

Welcome Corin, thanks for joining me.

**Corin Millais:** Thanks Virginia and thanks for having me on the show.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What is sustainability and what drives your passion around sustainability?

**Corin Millais:** Well sustainability is about the future, and as you say what we are teaching children at schools, about the future generations it’s very much part of the future and I guess sustainability means caring for the environment and the community and the world we live in for the longer term. Sustainability is my job, it’s my passion but it’s my entire life for which I owe my teacher at school, because at age 9, my brilliant geography teacher got me into bird watching and that’s inspired my whole career and sustainability journey and that was in the 1970’s.

So, a teacher changed my whole life at school by getting involved, and that’s what I owe him today, working with sustainability.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** That’s fabulous to hear, teachers having an amazing impact on children.

**Corin Millais:** And I also have many teachers in my family. I think 9 at the last count and my dad works in a bank so I think it’s written in the stars that I would end up working in sustainability for a bank called Teachers Mutual Bank.

As I said, I owe everything to my work and my passion to my teacher from school.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Can you help us understand what sustainability at Teachers Mutual Bank limited entails?

**Corin Millais:** Well yes. Our members contribute so much to society, and I think they deserve a bank that has a positive social impact. I think good people deserve a good bank. Now our slogan is, banking for good for those who do good and we try to make that happen in practice rather than just be words on a wall. Our aim is to make the whole bank sustainable, from the people, processes the product, the way we run it and have an holistic view. And our goal has been to be one of the most ethical banks in the world. We are aiming high to have high standards.

We’ve had a strong focus on the credentials and the proof to verify that we are we say we are as a sustainability and of cause what banks do, is money. So, we have a strong focus on responsible investment, ethical investment. The money that we have and look after, is done for the right things. So, I think for us it’s not a fad or a fashion, it’s essentially what we do as a community bank. And it’s exciting. This is the future of companies and where the next gen wants to go to work and what’s at the future generation wants and expects from companies who is part of society.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** When it comes to sustainability, I’ve heard the term, “greenwashing”? What does that mean?

**Corin Millais:** Well, these days sustainability is very common. I mean years ago, it was kind of a fringe topic and I think everyone’s got a stake in it. From people to communities to governments to companies and it seems that everyone the same, seems these days but are they really? And the term, greenwashing is really about companies or people saying that they are sustainable but not really doing it in truth. And the regulators are worried about this.

So, for banks, it’s important that the trust in what we say we do about being sustainable is put into practice. So, I think that the way to find around that greenwashing is about certification proof. If you make a claim, then do have the evidence. I mean, it’s an epidemic. Lots of companies are claiming they’re saving the planet but the planet is still in trouble. And one cure for that epidemic is credentials to have a third party verified source that can audit, I suppose and test whether your claims are proof, and that’s the path we’ve gone done about having external certifications, something called B Corp, which is sort of a global standard. It’s like the Olympic gold standard of sustainability. And we try and meet those standards to prove, what we are, what we say, we do.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** What would be your top tips to avoid choosing companies who are greenwashing rather than making a concerted effort in sustainable practices?

**Corin Millais:** Well, it certainly seems every company in Australia is claiming to be sustainable and is doing the right thing and that can’t be true so, really what you have to do is check the label of the claim. For example, you know my weekly shop I buy chocolate and I want to know if it’s sourced sustainably, so I don’t know all the information because there’s lots of choices but what I can see on that chocolate bar is the fair-trade logo, and to me that’s an indication that there is some certification, or some proof externally that it is, what it claims it to be. And you can’t be checking the labels in detail.

For banking, you’re essentially either banking with an organisation or buying a product with a deposit, so you’ve got to check the label. As I said, we are certified as a B Corp bank. B Corp is like the Olympic gold of sustainability credentials worldwide. There’s only 44 banks in the world who’ve met that criteria. And that proves to anyone who joins the bank, that we have the credentials which is tested over 300 questions, by the way, that we do have social and environmental governance impact. And we have other credentials like that as part of our package and our focus of being not to do flashy green ads or targeting a few green customers, but to guarantee 100% that our bank and its products are certified by external sources using the gold standard for international investment and that allows us to have trust, that what we say and what we do is right there. So, I think you got to check the label really and check the claims.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Following on from that, can you explain more about how sustainability ethics, social responsibility and corporate governance all work together?

**Corin Millais:** Well, these are all the pieces that make up what an organisation does to be a good and ethical bank and organization. So, there’s a lot of pieces to be done in a bank to sort of prove that we can cover all those areas. But for a bank like ours, it’s the core business model, I mean, our model is a profit for purpose philosophy. It drives the entire bank and so that impacts our governance, our process, our ethics, our policies, all the detailed way that we machinery is for running the bank. We’re not doing one or two green projects here and there; the whole bank is sustainable and ethical. Because we want to reassure our members that we are acting for benefit of people and the community and environment. We’re not just there to make money. And when you talk about whether an organisation is ethical that’s sort of also a moral aspect as well. But I think it’s a definition of that is, what you do when no one is watching. So, we’re trying to run the whole bank sustainably and ethically. If you lift the hood of the car, you’ll see there’s a big ethical engine driving it with the certification and the process.

In the end, it’s about people making decisions in the right way and how they do that. So, we want to be able to run our bank ethically so our members can have trust in how we are and what we do.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Given that you are a mutual bank,also known as a customer owned bank, do you think it makes it easier for you to have that environmental, social and corporate governance focus?

**Corin Millais:** Without question, being a mutual bank means that sustainability and ethical use is definitely baked into organisation’s culture and history in the way that we operate.

And in one way we are the same as any other bank, in terms that we are there to provide mortgages and Visa cards and accounts so, we are the same as any other bank, but we are different, and the way that it’s different is that our members own the bank. That’s what being a Mutual means so there’s no conflict between the shareholder versus customer because they’re one in the same. So we aren’t serving two masters, we’re serving one.

Profit isn’t taken out for shareholders but retained in the business. There’s no dividend. So, everything in the bank is owned and run by the members for the members and that’s a powerful way of running a business, for their good not for someone else’s. And it means not everything is judged on its payback for 6 months. So, it means we can pay longer term and we know more about the value of things and the price of things. And it was Oscar Wilde that said, “*a fool is someone that knows the price of everything and the value of nothing”*. And profits are the lifeblood of any business, they’re not the sole driver, and I think that people expect their bank to operate ethically and I think that mutual banks is a way that is proven in the way the whole organisation operates.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** So, do you think that sustainability and ethics has to come at a financial cost? I think for many of us, particularly at the moment with the cost-of-living increases, it feels like the focus is often just needs to be on survival. Is it a choice between our individual wellbeing and that of society?

**Corin Millais:** When I think of in the old days, it was hard between either or but I think these days much more sustainability going on in the market by governments and by people in communities you don’t need to choose cost over availability. What there is, is a cost of research to find out, I mean, a lot of products can be cheaper with recycling and solar and things like that. But it is confusing. You know as I say. I went to my weekly shop I look at the tuna and there’s 50 cans and they all say they’re dolphin friendly but I’ve got to work out which one is that? And then, probably the price will be the same.

What do we offer as a bank?

I think we can guarantee 100% that there is no extra cost for anything ethical. It’s in the price, it’s in the products and there is zero extra cost. You’re simply looking at a product from our bank, a mortgage or deposit or transaction account that’s the same. So, we can reassure people that there will be no levy, no extra cost and that their money is invested responsibilities. Joining our bank means you can do good with your money at no extra costs, and you can feel good about that. I guess that’s our core principle about how we operate across the whole bank, we’re not a company with green extras. It’s built in, not bolted on.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** I know for myself and for a lot of people, we’d like to make a difference but sometimes the choices and information can be really quite overwhelming. What would be some good simple things that we can do to make a difference?

**Corin Millais:** Well certainly there’s been a growing tide of socially aware consumers who are looking at banks and superfunds and what their practices are. I think there has been generally a rise of ethical consumers from solar to organics to key cups to plastics, so those consumer things are very easy to see and there’s lots of Top 5 Lists out there of what you can do for your home. It’s what you purchase and I think that banking is a bit more, it’s hard to see compared to a solar panel or a keep cup. But you’re still purchasing a product. And I think what’s changed is that you can make a difference by what you purchase. It’s not really about protesting or placard waving, anymore, and you can, if you like, vote with your wallet. There’s a lot more purpose lead companies out there. I think people are realising that your bank and your super can make a difference because of the money you have in it.

For example, you might spend, $20 on a keep cup, but your mortgage could be $300,000.00 and that’s thousands of times more difference so money has an impact and if you want to look at all the banks, there’s 140 odd banks in Australia with four big ones. You can pick and choose between banks about which ones are more sustainable and encourage people to check them out and see if they want to pick a more sustainable bank.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** In summary, your advice to us would be to do our homework and shop around?

**Corin Millais:** Well, I think everyone’s got a bank account or a mortgage more or less and I think most people are with the big four. What we’re encouraging people to look at is the other alternatives that perhaps have a better price and better sustainability record. There are other banks on the market apart from the ones you see.

We’re not well known, but we are a bank for teachers built by teachers and we have a very strong sustainable and ethical track record, and if that’s what you like then you can make a difference by moving banks. In the same way you can make a difference by shopping for solar or your keep cup. I think shopping around for your finance is also part of the sustainability journey that anyone can do. I encourage people to check us out on line and to see if you like us then make that part of your consideration.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Thanks for your time, Corin, you’ve definitely given us something to think about.

**Corin Millais:** Thanks very much. I’ve been guided by my teacher from the 1970’s, so I’m still going strong on what I leant at school.

**Virginia Bowdidge:** Oh, that’s wonderful to hear.

**Corin Millais:** Thank you.

**Announcer** You have been listening to a Queensland Department of Education podcast.

The Department of Education acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands from across Queensland. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.