

18/09/2011
Mr. K. Hartmann

Submission for the attention of

The Joint Select Committee on Australia's Clean Energy Future Legislation

To whom it may concern,

The committee has been established to inquire into and report on a number of bills related to the introduction of a carbon dioxide tax and later emissions trading scheme.

Submissions have been invited from interested parties. As an Australian citizen with some knowledge of the science I feel that a submission addressing two major concerns with the proposed legislation is appropriate.

The only thing that can be said with certainty about anthropogenic global warming is that the debate is not over and the science is not settled. In the absence of greater certainty the present government has chosen to adopt a precautionary approach and limit CO₂ emissions. While this approach may be a prudent response to what is potentially a serious risk, the proposed legislation may benefit from adjustment in two areas to better reflect scientific uncertainty.

The first adjustment I would propose is a "Sunset Clause". At present a large amount of the scientific uncertainty concerns the sign and strength of feedbacks within the climate in response to radiative forcing by CO₂. What the committee may be unaware of is that the IPCC has included strongly positive water vapour feedback in the modelling indicating dangerous or catastrophic warming. Increasingly, empirical evidence from radiosonde balloons, satellites and ocean buoys is indicating that water vapour feedback may in fact be negative. If this is the case then anthropogenic CO₂ emissions pose little risk. I would strongly advise that the legislation be amended to include a clause that would remove the proposed bills from Australian law if water vapour feedback in response to radiative forcing by CO₂ is shown beyond reasonable doubt to be negative.

The second proposed adjustment relates to the legal status of "Carbon Units" in the proposed legislation. The granting of property rights to what is in effect an artificial financial instrument carries considerable risk for Australian citizens. Adjusting or rescinding the legislation in response to changing scientific information is made more difficult if Carbon Units are considered property. While taking precautionary action with regard to CO₂ may be seen as appropriate by some, legislating Carbon Units as property does not accurately reflect the present scientific uncertainties.

Yours sincerely

Mr. K. Hartmann