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From: gerhard@dove.net.au [SMTP:gerhard@dove.net.au]
Sent: Wednesday, August 23, 2000 6:43 PM
To: The Secretary
Subject: Kyoto Protocol Inquiry

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Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol
The Committee will examine:

The implications for Australia of proceeding or not proceeding to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and meeting its target emissions levels by 2008 with regard to anticipated and/or predicted economic, environmental and social outcomes both nationally and in specific regional areas.
What definitions and criteria Australia should develop and actively pursue in its national interest

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Submission from Gerhard Weissmann, Chartered Engineer, B Tech, M Env Studies, MIEE
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21st August 2000

The Secretary,
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Inquiry into the Kyoto Protocol
e-mail: jsct@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary,

The wholesale acceptance of globalisation by our Federal Government with all its implications raises the valid expectation that Australia should also accept in full its international obligations to the global community under the Kyoto Protocol.

It is a matter of concern that Australia extracted extra concessions under the Protocol. It might have been more prudent to accept the same obligations that other nations accepted. That would have shown that globalisation as a principle of responsible behaviour as a world nation is accepted by the Australian government. This is quite independent from the question whether the "veracity of conflicting current scientific theories on global warming and any solutions proposed for it" is backed by data or not. There is general acceptance of evidence of Climate Change as a consequence of atmospheric pollution and ignoring or denying it, implies denigration of global concerns.

In consequence, it would seem appropriate for Australia to take every opportunity to reduce its contribution to atmospheric pollution. Such a behaviour should be seen to be “in Australia’s best interests”, not whether such action impacts on the profitability of the corporate sector. Since that sector has shown itself to be insensitive to any national concerns in its proposals under the MAI and its subsequent clones, it can no longer expect to be treated as contributing much to Australia’s wealth. The extraction of the nation’s resource assets and their conversion into corporate liquid wealth is no longer in the national interest and need no longer be facilitated.

“The economic, environmental and social implications of a punitive approach to any domestic regulation of industry including such proposals as a carbon tax and an incentive-based approach” need no longer be an impediment to just such procedures being put in place. Economics is devoid of environmental and social ethics, therefore ethics need no longer be considered a valid consideration when justified taxes impact on economic profit maximisation.

As a principle, it is suggested that regulation is not a very effective way to control abuses and wastage of national resource assets. The practices of large-scale agribusiness using scarce irrigation water to produce massive exports at cost to our river systems and destruction of soils should be taxed out of existence, since they contribute substantially to national inflation through water costs, cleanup etc.

Punitive taxation seems a much fairer, less intrusive and softer approach to shape corporate preferences than regulation. A carbon tax may not be acceptable, but substantial Royalties on water resources, Natural Gas and other fossil fuels, particularly on export, seems eminently desirable. Future opportunities foregone by present resource exports must be factored into the price of these resources, particularly gas, since it is such an important fuel in the light of climate change considerations.

Royalties on export of natural gas from the NW Shelf may also reduce that stream of nonrenewable resources undermining Australia’s future ability for using the gas to meet domestic transport needs to replace petroleum products. Such replacement is an important mechanism that could be employed in the efforts to meet the Kyoto Protocol. If the gas is substantially exported now, any efforts in technological development of gas based alternatives are cut off before they even start. Every effort should now be made to conserve the gas, not export it, and to develop gas based fuels that can take over from petroleum or coal. Carbon dioxide may be sequestered back into the ground if that is the best we can do with it for now.

Carbon credits are a nonsense. Australia should revegetate degraded farmland anyway as a remedial practice for putting up with destructive farming practices in the past, where a lot of land was and still is being degraded in export oriented

activities. All export makes Australia poorer in resources and natural amenity. As long as Australia can still meet its own requirements, the national interest would dictate that any areas that are not needed to produce for Australia's own needs should be taken out of production and revegetated to correct those abuses of the past and provide Greenhouse Gas sinks anyway. Such practices should not be made dependent whether anyone pays for it or not.

If ownership considerations of degraded farms is held up as a disincentive against a change in land management, then conversion of lease or freehold into "conservation" or "pollution sink" areas could be considered. The present title holders can be retained as caretakers on their farms and paid salaries. Many would be likely to welcome such changes.

Yours faithfully,

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