

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

Labor's proposed emissions trading scheme is just an ineffectual watered down version of what should be an effective weapon in the fight against catastrophic climate change.

As someone who voted for this government on the basis of their election promises to tackle climate change in meaningful ways, I am extremely disappointed, angry, let down and appalled. The people of Australia have been lied to and conned by a government who has bowed to the big business dollar. Shame on you, Penny Wong and Kevin Rudd!

It seems that in the face of the current global financial crisis we have all but forgotten a much greater issue, one with ramifications of monumental and potentially catastrophic proportions.

As long ago as November 1992, a document signed by sixteen hundred of the world's leading scientists, including half of all the Nobel Prize winners at that time, issued a warning to all humanity that human beings and the natural world were on a collision course. The document listed all the pending crises in the atmosphere, water resources, soils, the oceans, forests, biodiversity and over-population. The same eminent persons warned that no more than one or a few decades at the most remained to avert the threat of vast human suffering and misery and admonished world leaders that great changes in our stewardship of the Earth and its resources were needed to avoid the irretrievable mutilation of our global home. Alas, humanity has virtually ignored these most astoundingly important pronouncements, losing nearly two decades in which we could and should have begun the introduction of tangible measures to preserve and protect the biosphere against further harm. There is little doubt that every year lost has contributed massively to the potential hardships and suffering our children and grandchildren will endure.

Scientists tell us that approximately one hundred million years ago when the continents were arranged differently, Earth was in fact 5 to 15 degrees (C) warmer than it is today. Of course that was long before the existence of Homo sapiens. Then, as the continents drifted apart, the planet cooled steadily. Ice core samples taken from the Arctic show that over the last nine thousand years the Earth's temperature has been relatively stable.

That stability lasted until the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. However, since that time, there has been a marked rise in temperature. Because the temperature rise has been over a relatively short period and it has coincided with increased greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and de-forestation, there can be little doubt that the progressive heating of the planet is due to man's activities. Nevertheless, temperature increase has been most marked since the 1950's when consumerism became the Western World's new code for living and factories geared for the war effort, switched to pumping out products for the new "throw away" age. With the emergence of China and India's industrial economies that are now pumping seemingly endless volumes of harmful pollutant gases into the atmosphere, the rate at which temperatures are escalating each year is sounding alarm bells around the world. Al Gore in his sensational cinematographic epic *The Inconvenient Truth* brought the message home to millions. Except for diehard sceptics, Gore finally dispelled the last vestige of arguments asserting that global warming is merely a natural phenomenon. Since Gore's movie many climate scientists have in fact backed calls for a "global-wide call to arms" in the fight against potentially fatal climatic changes.

Unfortunately, to this day, some hold the belief that only one or two degrees spread over the next fifty or so years will make little difference. Regrettably for the world, there are many politicians (Australia's Labor Government seems to be among them) and business leaders among these deniers of the facts.

These ill-informed folk should speak to those residing on low lying nations such as Tuvalu, The Maldives, Bangladesh and many coastal areas of just about every nation that's not landlocked. They would soon discover unfortunate folk of these and many other nations are under imminent threat from rising sea levels.

In addition to the growing inundation of heavily populated nations, we are already experiencing an increase in the severity and frequency of devastating tornadoes, cyclones and storms. Most climatologists now attribute these events and changing weather patterns to the over-heating of our planet.

Droughts have also increased in severity and duration, while polar ice caps along with all of the world's glaciers and the Greenland ice shelf are melting at alarming rates. Africa's and Asia's deserts continue to expand, forcing many poor communities to abandon traditional homelands, throwing greater strain upon the ability of impoverished and bankrupt nations to respond to the growing number of the new ecological

refugees. Vector-borne diseases such as malaria and encephalitis are now becoming common in areas previously immune from such threat. As crops regularly fail through lack of rain, starvation is a growing problem while in the planet's oceans, many marine species are under threat of extinction from higher seawater temperatures, increased acidification, the loss of corals and sea grasses and the rapid proliferation of marine vermin such as, the Crown of Thorns starfish. Meanwhile, grass has been discovered growing in the arctic for the first time. While this enables some creatures to move closer to the North Pole, many species such as polar bears and emperor penguins which are dependant upon cold conditions are threatened with extinction. Flowers are blossoming, birds are migrating and frogs breeding 2 to 3 days earlier with each passing decade and while some life forms flourish in warmer temperatures, others have been forced from their habitats. With the thawing of vast areas of tundra, massive quantities of methane (which is five times more damaging than CO<sub>2</sub>) are being released into the atmosphere exacerbating the already critical problem we blithely call, "the greenhouse effect."

The world's oceans affect our weather more than many realise. They are in fact, massive natural engines driving climates and weather patterns across the globe. As warm water from the equator is driven northward by wind and air currents, evaporation and the formation of sea ice contribute to the density of arctic seawater which then cools, sinks and returns southward again.

In 2004, submarine exploration beneath the arctic ice cap discovered that only two of the seven gigantic cold water columns that help drive ocean circulation were functioning. Alarmed scientists reported that global warming is threatening the ability of these currents to operate. They found the remaining columns were pathetically weak in comparison to their normal function, raising speculation that rising temperatures may completely shut down thermohaline circulation with potentially catastrophic consequences for Northern Europe, Russia and The United Kingdom.

There is no longer any doubt that the major cause of entire ecosystems collapsing is anthropogenic, although such factors as the Earth's orbital path, volcanic eruptions on the sea floor and beneath the arctic ice, gravitational changes, energy from deep space and sun spot activity all play a part. However, where changes in temperature result from such causes, the Earth's ecosystems could probably compensate and adapt without significant harm to life. On the other hand, the planet's complex systems are clearly unable to cope with man's intervention.

Because there are so many factors contributing to the climate change debate, scientists really do not know what will happen within the next five years let alone the next fifty. Nevertheless, few would deny the devastating consequences of man's impact upon the planet, or that these will continue for thousands of years even if we were to halt all greenhouse gas emissions tomorrow (and that's obviously not going to happen). Despite the best efforts of scientists so far, most predictions and prognosis have proved inaccurate. For example, the rates at which the arctic icecap is melting, the disappearance of glaciers and changing weather patterns have exceeded the worst predictions.

If there is a collapse or further significant slowing of thermohaline circulation, no one knows whether Northern Europe will become appreciably warmer, cooler, or even plunge into a new ice-age!

Most climate experts would now agree, we cannot afford to adopt a wait and see approach while climate change boffins continue with more computer modelling and study the complex web of interdependent factors.

Even if we still believe that global warming and climate change are just part of the Earth's natural cycles, the outcomes will be the same as if they are anthropogenic. There will be massive misery and suffering if we fail to act now.

Merely reacting to changing circumstances will not suffice; we must become super-proactive and assume that worst-case scenarios will become our reality. We must rapidly implement counter-measures and form long term plans to cope with a crisis that is unprecedented in ferocity and magnitude since the history of man.

Meanwhile, back to the global economic meltdown

While the pain of industry bankruptcies, mortgage foreclosures and job loss is very real in the hardships inflicted upon those most affected, we cannot afford to drop the ball when it comes to climate change. Indeed, the suffering we are now experiencing as a consequence of corporate greed, and the undoubted lack of appropriate checks and balances on lending, will seem insignificant compared with the prognosis of many of the world's top scientists, should we fail to heed their warnings.

In the hope of boosting consumption, governments appear to be almost throwing money at national economies with “bailout” packages and handouts to citizens, while many are left wondering if it is a gigantic gamble that’s destined to fail. After all, when any individual spends more than he or she earns, thus ending up owing creditors, isn’t it responsible and logical to knuckle down, work hard, repay debts and live within one’s means?

Surely, when in financial trouble, any sane person wouldn’t go out and borrow more money and spend it just to maintain a lifestyle which has proved disastrously extravagant? Haven’t too many of us been living in a fool’s paradise of rampant consumerism and excessive personal luxury? Is the plight of the nation any different just because it is on a much bigger scale? Didn’t the economic house of cards have to come crashing down at some point? Where should taxpayer’s money be going?

Maybe, the strategy of borrowing against the future to ease present pain will work, but is it fiscally responsible to prop up industries based on fossil-fuel technologies when oil reserves are running out and environmental costs of polluting the biosphere at current rates will spell our demise?

If we are going to mortgage our children’s future, should we not be looking at spending money on infrastructure projects that will not cause further environmental damage and will improve the quality of life for our citizens in the future? This would seem the right moment to also accelerate the development and introduction of environmentally sustainable technologies and other measures with maximum long-term benefits to all humanity?

Here are some worthwhile suggestions where government subsidies could have lasting benefits:

- Establishment of giant solar power plants similar to that due to come on line in California
- Solar, wind, geothermal hot rock (GHR) and tidal power,
- Hybrid motor vehicles, hydrogen fuel cell and electric cars and other technologies yet to evolve,
- Solar hot water systems, thin-film photovoltaic cells,
- Double glazing and eco-friendly buildings and homes,
- Water tanks, grey water systems,
- Household water treatment systems that re-use water over and over,
- Domestic wind turbines,
- Research into the development of “water from air” devices,
- Making current buildings and homes energy efficient, and designing new buildings for sustainability,
- Better city and town planning which discourages automobile usage and encourages patronage of energy efficient, zero emission public transport.

Injection of capital in such areas would undoubtedly create new jobs. In addition, by offering incentives to existing companies, who are currently struggling to survive and urging them to divert productive capacity into the examples outlined may save countless jobs which could otherwise be lost.

Australia, like many nations has vast deserts and straddles latitudes from tropical to temperate zones. Traditionally, the nation’s food bowl has been in the cooler south, however, these agriculturally productive areas are drought-stricken and have been for so for several years, devastating production. The hotter north now bears the brunt of more severe cyclones and their inherent flooding.

While the large percentage of the country’s population has dealt with water restrictions, abundant rains fill northern catchments to overflowing with much of this water running to waste in the oceans. Met with cries of, “too expensive,” proposals to pipe water from northern dams, rivers and lakes to satiate the south’s needs never get passed the drawing board, but perhaps should be revisited with an eye on drought-proofing the nation and assuring it is able to play its part in feeding a world whose hunger grows exponentially each year.

More now than ever before, we need leaders with vision and courage and if viewed through a different perspective, the global economic crisis might just be a blessing in disguise. Please do not waste this opportunity to tackle climate change through an effective emissions trading scheme.

Thank you

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