

JINDABYNE CHAPTER



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SUBMISSION ON SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE - ETS

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Dear Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Standing Committee on the ETS. Evidence from the European ETS model appears to indicate that the ETS is not an effective tool to cut greenhouse gas emissions and that an ETS may indeed encourage shifting responsibility from the high end polluters to the general population.

If the global population wishes to make a concerted effort to cut pollution - whether atmospheric, soil, water etc - then we need to do so quickly and effectively. If we consider that rising CO2 levels instrumental in rising global temperatures and associated biospheric problems, now impacting on human populations and well as the environment, then we need to act decisively.

The Rudd Labor Party and now Government, committed prior to the 2007 Federal Election to act quickly, decisively and effectively to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Rather than strongly following through from the ratification of Kyoto - a key platform for their election - we have witnessed and almost 'hands in the air don't look at me' approach to the problem of rising CO2 levels. This is unacceptable. The incoming government does not have a mandate to implement a dismissive and ultimately reckless approach to dealing with pollution. The responsibility rests with political representatives to fulfill the wishes of the broader community. This does not mean to create or effect policies that keep the donors to political campaigns happy. It does not mean to allow or facilitate policy development from vested interests such as the coal, mining or industry sectors who clearly wish to preserve the status quo business as usual approach, ultimately, profit. This does not mean that the Government denies real access and legitimate power on a voter by voter basis and instead appropriates that power and divests decisions towards the minority - even though they may be influential through lobbying, financial or other power, through more direct access. It does not mean that the Government can use the 'global financial crisis' as a means to deflect or postpone its mandated responsibilities.

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It means that the Government must be held quickly to account on important issues such as atmospheric pollution and the implications for the health of the biosphere.

Equally unacceptable is the fallacious argument that “Australia only emits a tiny fraction of global pollution and if we don’t burn coal someone else will.” This erroneous and somewhat childish protest to avoid pecuniary responsibility is unacceptable in a mature government. It is also unacceptable to the majority of reasoning Australians who expect better from political parties and their representatives.

The need of the hour is clearly for strong vision and leadership. The world is switching to renewable energy - not clean coal or biofuels - as the mainstream energy source along with demand management, energy efficiencies, retrofitting buildings to reduce energy consumption, higher gross feed in tariffs and other effective measures and incentives to develop the new energy economy, whether that be solar or hydrogen.

The question is does Australia drag so far behind the rest of the world? The question is why is Australia not leading the rest of the world harnessing the energy of the sun, developing state-of-the-art portable energy systems, investing in hydrogen or solar/thermal and solar/stirling engine, geothermal energy for domestic, industrial, transport and other transport needs?

To the majority of people the answer is simple that the coal lobby is powerful, influential and take up the oxygen that would otherwise be available to the renewable energy sector. The answer for the environment is that greed certainly takes a position on the front bench and the environment is a very poor squatter on the back benches of the House of Representatives - although well represented in the Senate.

Our need is for you the Senate Selection Committee on the ETS to think sensibly, rationally, based on evidence and based on a sense of the urgency of containing human pollution, population, resource extraction and consumption and ensuing pollution in Australia and on the planet by way of Australian exports.

The ETS and 5% cuts in emissions by 2020 is not only laughable as a policy, it is absolutely dangerous in terms of the impacts on the environment and already, in terms of the emerging perpetually shifting population of environmental and ultimately, economic refugees who have either lost land and territory, or homes, or capacity to grow food, to find water and sustain their lives. This is the emerging national and global security issues - not terrorism.

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The state of the environment is indeed appalling, whether it be the death of the Snowy River, the over-extraction of the Murray, the pollution with agricultural chemicals of our soils, rivers and people or the carcinogens in the atmosphere as a result of burning fossil fuels. One could present tomes of information on environmental collapses that far outweigh the recent global financial collapse. One could provide abundant evidence that the myopia of greed wins at every step until of course, the people on this Senate Select Committee act on the basis of evidence rather than pecuniary interests influencing the political process in Australia.

As the Chair of the Jindabyne Chapter of Clean Energy for Eternity - living within a region where the Snowy River Shire Council has committed to a target of 50:50 by 20:20 - that is a cut by 50% of energy consumption and 50% renewable energy by 2020, the cuts of 5% by 2020 are ludicrous. As the Alpine Riverkeeper and member of the Snowy River Alliance working to restore the life and health of the Snowy River, truncated as it is and robbed of its vital tributaries in order to 'divert' water for energy generation and ultimately, water trading for profits along with a range of unsupportable 'insurance products' or hedge products for the corporatised Snowy Hydro, I find that greed as the primary goal for 'expanding' the fossil fuel sector - whether that be coal, gas or biofuels - as quite frankly offensive and indefensible.

We need to change our goals and objectives. Profit and returning shareholder dividends has done nothing to respect or protect the basis of life on this earth - the balance of gases in the atmosphere, the water cycle, fertile soils and a well balanced sustainable human population.

As a part of this Select Committee may I request the following:

Follow up change to corporations law that places environmental and humanitarian principles and outcomes on an equal footing as monetary 'shareholder dividends'.

Stringent requirements to meet 'green credentials' and issue of renewable energy certificates - for example - Snowy Hydro P/L cannot claim green credentials when it participates so strongly in robbing the Snowy River of vital flows.

The focus be shifted away from the ETS to CPRS and that realistic targets be set at 50% cuts in emissions by 2020 and 50% renewable energy by 2020. These targets are achievable simply through MRET and higher gross feed in tariff for renewable energy along with incentives such as investing Australia's wealth in renewable energy (the science is already in) and research into energy storage.

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That governments deliver on election promises within 3 months or leave office. 18 months after the so-called commitments of the incumbent government there is little action and much watering down of targets and objectives. This is a form of electoral fraud and cannot be tolerated within a robust democracy.

Finally, I trust that rather than reflexive political processes we have in the Senate Standing Committee on ETS an inspired, informed and conscionable Committee of people who will act in the interests of the environment - both for Australia and globally - and recognise that the way out of the financial mess is to stimulate the new energy economy - the renewable energy economy, the hydrogen and solar economy that will cut toxic emissions from the earth's atmosphere. It is not our earth to plunder and spoil for other life forms and future generations. It is not our earth to pillage.

Better a good day on a Committee to deliver a better future for the Earth than a decade in government or parliament built on promises that were never intended to be delivered. If we can't think highly enough of ourselves to breathe clean air and drink unpolluted water then at least think highly enough of others and ensure they have that opportunity.

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