

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

I won't burden you with another copy of the excellent model submission on the web page of the Greens Senators. Suffice it to say that I agree totally with it.

What is the difference between the CPRS and King Canute's scheme for holding back the sea? King Rudd is prepared to move his throne 5 to 15% of the way up the beach.

Or what is the difference between the CPRS and a suicidal car driver speeding at 100 kph toward a precipice? Well, Driver Wong would take the precaution of slowing down to something between 85 and 95 and tell you this was better than continuing at 100.

But the CPRS is not just useless. As the model submission says - it is worse than useless. As it stands, it will merely neuter all the voluntary effort people are putting in to "do their bit" - breaking their hearts and their spirits.

There is only so much contempt and manipulation you can heap upon the efforts of people who are prepared to put the general interest and the long-term interest ahead of their own narrow self-interest.

They are the glory and the hope of Australia. But if you want environmental politics to descend to a more or less bloodless variety of guerrilla warfare just try selling them all out once too often to curry favour with the hollow men in suits with deep pockets.

Worse still, just try doing it over the most urgent and important issue the human race will ever face - an issue of life and death for future generations both human and other.

Chances are, that Australia - the driest continent whose dichotomy of droughts (and fires) and flooding rains seems to be becoming more acute by the year - will be the first place where high-tech human civilisation hits a dead end - along with the planet's most unique flora and fauna. More than any other country on earth, we need to take the lead.

However, we have this coal-addiction. We want to do the right thing, but not if it requires us to give up doing the wrong thing.

But this is not just a matter of avoiding disaster. We can seize the chance to put our whole economy on a new trajectory toward sustainability. We need to be optimistic and brave enough to try.

On one occasion when I worked in archives I had to list wartime External Affairs cable traffic, among which I came across a copy for information of a cable Churchill sent to Roosevelt in early 1940 (just about when I was getting born) in which he said quite frankly that the chances of keeping Hitler's army out of the British Isles looked pretty slim "but anyhow, we are going to try". After all, what else could they do?

And the chances of success on the sustainability route are at least far better than the chances of achieving something safe, timely and useful by taking the nuclear route or the "clean coal" route. (The equivalent, I suppose, of trying to make a deal with Hitler.)

Nature took many millions of years - back in the carboniferous age - to geosequester an excess of atmospheric carbon as coal and oil - thereby turning the biosphere of this planet from a very unpleasant place lethal to most of the sorts of life it supports today to the biosphere we know and take for granted. Digging up all that coal and pumping up all that oil to get the energy out of it, and hoping that we can somehow get the carbon back into the bottle, makes a lot less sense than a strategy of working flat out to develop alternative sustainable energy sources so we can leave the already-sequestered carbon where it is.

Because there is nothing more important than this biosphere in which we live and move and have our being, and keeping it liveable for organisms like us. What purpose can we have in life that is greater than this?

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