

## **The problem is NATURAL climate change, stupid!**

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Should we have needed it, Mother Nature has just provided us with a reminder of the power and danger of natural climatic events. In February, monsoonal downpours of more than 1.2 m in 7 days caused large parts of tropical Australia to be flooded; rivers rose up to 12 m above their normal level, with 62% of Queensland (580,000 sq km) designated as a disaster area. At the same time, large areas of the southern state of Victoria were ravaged by firestorms that razed areas greater than 4,500 sq km, in the process destroying more than 2,000 houses, leaving more than 7,000 people homeless and causing more than 200 deaths.

“Weather” and “climate” are conventionally distinguished as daily-to-annual and 30-yr-averaged meteorological measurements, respectively. But in reality climate processes – which are dynamic, non-linear, and a manifestation of heat transfer and distribution throughout two interconnected, turbulent, fluid envelopes (the ocean and the atmosphere) – occur over all time scales from seconds up to millions of years in length. In this context, the two recent natural disasters in Australia, far from being unusual, represent typical climatological hazards such as planet Earth has ever been heir to.

The current public “debate” on climate is not so much a debate as it is an incessant and shrill campaign to scare citizens into accepting dramatic changes in their way of life in pursuit of the false god of preventing dangerous global warming. Furthermore, this “debate” is consistently misrepresented by the media as being between morally admirable “believers” and morally challenged “deniers”. In reality, such shallow moralities have nothing to do with science, which derives its own considerable moral and practical authority from the objective use of facts, experiments and analytical reasoning to test hypotheses about the natural world.

In this context, all competent scientists accept (i) that global climate has always changed, and always will; (ii) that human activities (not just carbon dioxide emissions) definitely affect local climate, and have the potential, summed, to measurably affect global climate; and (iii) that carbon dioxide is a mild greenhouse gas. The true scientific debate, then, is about none of these issues, but rather about the sign and magnitude of any global human effect, and its likely significance when considered in the context of natural climate change. To date, and despite spending more than \$50 billion looking since 1990, no evidence has emerged of a worrisome magnitude for human-caused global climate change.

The matter of dealing with future climate change, therefore, is primarily one of risk appraisal, and that for risks which vary from place to place. In this context it is certain that natural climate change is going to continue, and that from time to time human and environmental damage will be wrought. Future changes will include cooling trends, warming trends and sudden step-events. Extreme weather events (and their consequences) are natural disasters of similar character to earthquakes, tsunami and volcanic eruptions, in that in our present state of knowledge they can neither be predicted far ahead nor prevented once they are underway.

The existence of such natural hazards is the prime reason why civil defense agencies exist. Throughout the world, such agencies consist of a mix of national and regional organizations and volunteer groups. Though not unhealthy of necessity, such complex overlapping of responsibilities often leads to overlaps or gaps in emergency response to particular disasters, and also tends to be financially inefficient.

New Zealand, has established a world best-practice civil defense agency to deal with natural environmental hazards (GeoNet). GeoNet provides other authorities and the public with accurate, evidence-based information about hazards like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, landslides and floods. Though longer term climate change has so far not been included in GeoNet planning, it differs from the hazards that are covered only in the extended decadal time-scales over which a deleterious trend might occur. GeoNet already deals with the short-term weather events such as storms and floods, and the risks of longer term climatic changes could be easily and cost-effectively managed by such a national hazard agency. Appropriately, GeoNet is linked to a parallel public compensation agency called the Earthquake Commission.

Using GeoNet as a model, it is time to move away from stale “he-says she-says” arguments about whether human carbon dioxide emissions are causing dangerous warming, and on to designing effective policies of climate adaptation. For the key issue on which all scientists agree is that natural climate change is real and exacts very real human and environmental costs. “Greenhouse gas reduction” is an irrelevancy, for it deals only with the hypothetical problem of as-yet-unmeasured human-caused global warming, and that at a time when the globe has been cooling for ten years.

Emissions trading legislation, despite its current popularity with governments, represents an ineffectual response to speculative global warming only, and is neither an adequate national climate policy nor even a desirable part of one. In contrast, policies are needed by all countries, including USA, that will improve our ability to recognize and adapt to real (i.e., natural) climate change, and circumstances dictate that these strategies be adaptive.

Climate change as a natural hazard is as much a geological as it is a meteorological issue. Thus it needs to be managed in the same way as other geohazards, i.e., by monitoring for the onset of dangerous events and having a civil defense response plan to deal with events that eventuate. Policymakers must abandon the IPCC’s alarmist virtual realities of human-forced climate change, and the utterly illusory goal of “preventing global warming”. Dealing with climate reality as it unfolds, a national disaster response agency – let us call it HazNet - whose mission encompasses all major environmental hazards represents a prudent, practical and cost-effective middleground solution to the climate change issue.

Even were generous funding to be provided for implementation, the overall costs of a HazNet are orders of magnitude less than those of unnecessary and ineffectual carbon dioxide taxes that represent non-solutions to a non-problem. To boot, contingent damage to the economy, energy systems, the standard of living and the world food supply would be avoided.

Just as the “science” that is cited in support of dangerous human warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions shows all the hallmarks of orchestrated propaganda, so too the real science shows beyond doubt that a wide array of extreme natural events – which include climatic warming trends, cooling trends, step-events, heat waves, droughts, cyclones, floods and snowstorms – poses great dangers for humanity.

As former N.Z. environment minister Simon Upton recently wrote: *“It is pointless to apportion blame. But for the sake of environmental credibility and business certainty, the plea has now surely to be that our legislators try to build some constructive middle ground. ... Anyone who has studied the [climate change] issue in good faith knows that there are no certainties and that it is a risk management issue.”*

A society that has prepared itself properly to cope with the weather and climate changes that Nature herself imposes is, by that very fact, well prepared for human-caused change as well.