

[Mrs] M. Isobel Jones,

Friday, 19th September, 2008

Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Climate Change and “Greenhouse” Emissions

This letter sets out some ideas forwarded to the Prime Minister’s office in July: having received no acknowledgement of that letter, and having seen your Committee’s web page, may I propose the following for inclusion among the many aspects of Fuel and Energy Policy currently under consideration by the Senate Select Committee?

On the current and important subject of **climate change** and **noxious emissions**, may I posit some basic premises and ask a few questions? It is my belief that all responsible citizens readily recognise the need for urgent, effective and lasting change to our patterns of fuel consumption and consequent emissions: and that countless numbers of ordinary Australians genuinely want to contribute, significantly, to positive and lasting solutions. However, people feel disconnected and remote from access to, and availability of, the means to do so – and even more so, in non-metropolitan regions. This is where, I suggest, wise and effective government policies could make a tremendous difference.

One example: has anyone in government considered the setting up of not-for-profit government or semi-government entrepreneurial and/or organisational bodies [i.e. not existing primarily for the benefit of shareholders, but rather as

a public service] to facilitate implementation and widespread use of already existing alternative energy technologies by householders and small business operators? Imagine, for example: if funding could be made available for such property owners to install solar cell panels, beginning with volunteers who have buildings easily able to support the necessary hardware, and then progressively expanding, in time, to an optimum level across the entire community.

[In the 1980s, I visited a relative in Switzerland who lived in an apartment complex of about eight households, serviced by solar cell panels around the roof, providing outlet power and trans-seasonal indoor temperature control. Technology must have advanced significantly since then.]

- Citizens could have their installations arranged for, and fully funded by, such an NFP body – solving problems of ready access to necessary equipment, possible unreliability on the part of unscrupulous marketers, and confusion as to best practice – with the components to remain the property of the Commonwealth, until paid for via some kind of instalment plan. Ownership could then devolve to the property owner after complete reimbursement of the government's outlay.
- Payments could be made at a rate reasonable to citizens' means – as quickly as they may wish, but at least in amounts not less than comparable to the median payment of their current energy bills – thus removing the heavy financial disincentives of up-front householder costs.
- Moreover, the incentive to save further on energy consumption could be embedded in a scheme to credit, against their installation debt, any unused electricity, which may be redirected to the main power grid.
- Incentive to use this solar technology would be enhanced by the undoubtedly pleasant prospect that, once the initial debt had been paid, there would be no further bills for power usage, except for whatever minimum fee might be necessary to cover on-going maintenance, servicing, etc.
- The government would, in effect, provide interest free loans, but would recoup its primary capital expenditure in a reasonable time; and simultaneously gain the community-based asset of an ongoing sustainable energy network, as an integral part of the overall power generation infrastructure.

- Demand on existing providers could thereby be drastically reduced, and this quite expeditiously: so lightening the burden on the environment and on finite resources, of polluters like coal-fired power stations.
- Many jobs could be created: in manufacture, in installation, in provision of enhanced power grid infrastructure, in service and maintenance, in administration, and even in international marketing.
- Such a policy could provide opportunities for the solar energy industry to be nurtured and grown into a thriving component of our economy – with research and development in the field of solar energy being stimulated, and markets readily open for improved technology and products.
- Australia, with its plentiful sunshine and other natural resources and geographical advantages, could become a global exemplar, perhaps even be among world leaders in demonstration and marketing of effective community-based solar technology at an international level.
- With such a scheme successfully established, it could lead to further projected expansion in strategies to reduce pollution and fossil fuel consumption – imagine, for example, coming home at night to plug the family’s electric-powered car into the clean solar-fuelled electricity supply in the family garage, charge it up overnight, and be ready for pollution free shopping and commuter trips, etc., the next day.
- This could in turn stimulate a possible electric automobile industry [also an existing technology] ... converting and reutilising closed-down vehicle manufacture facilities, currently being wasted in idleness ... stimulating more R&D ... more jobs ... less vehicle pollution ... decreased reliance on increasingly expensive petrol imports... and so on.
- A growing electric vehicle industry could, perhaps, even provide possibilities for governments to begin setting certain fixed guidelines for vehicle safety; and to institute a process of gradual elimination of the many unsafe vehicles, contributing to so much human tragedy, and the on-going degradation of already inadequate highway systems.

Similar schemes could also be developed in areas such as rainwater harvesting and water conservation, with acquisition of rainwater tanks: or with the installation of sustainable-energy measures in new housing construction, such as waste recycling, underground air-pipes for temperature control, and so on. I am sure there is no need to continue spelling out the many and various exciting possibilities.

Though some members may question, philosophically, the public ownership or government regulation of at least some of our vital infrastructure and social policy – it would seem apparent that a judicious combination of public and private incentives and guidelines might hold out some hope of avoiding yet more of the destructive chaos which is presently unfolding in the global financial sector.

Basically, I suppose, my main point is: *please find ways to make it **uncomplicated and advantageous** for ordinary private citizens to be involved in positive solutions:* **then** watch the rate of constructive change accelerate!

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Isobel Jones

Similar letter sent, two months ago, to:

The Hon. Kevin Rudd, MP,
Prime Minister of Australia.

The Hon. Mr Peter Garratt, AM, MP,
Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

Senator, the Hon. Penny Wong,
Minister for Climate Change and Water.