

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

Despite the lack of financial resources, I have progressively reduced my carbon footprint. This has involved recycling greywater, producing most of our fresh vegetables (and some fruit and pulses) in the back garden, building a composting toilet, using a bicycle and public transport wherever possible, and recently installing solar voltaic cells on the house. So it is particularly irksome that voluntary emission reductions are not accounted for under the CPRS.

The current so called economic crisis has presented a unique opportunity to make the necessary structural changes that are essential to create a "sustainable" future for this country. These changes will require individuals to radically alter energy intensive "lifestyle" modes of behaviour. This is often equated with a "high" standard of living. However this concept has not served us well from an environmental perspective, and is connected with continuing economic growth and increasing consumption. As J. K. Galbraith noted in 1958:

If we are concerned about our great appetite for materials, it is plausible to seek to increase the supply, to decrease waste, to make better use of the stocks that are available, and to develop substitutes. But what of the appetite itself? Surely this is the ultimate source of the problem. If it continues its geometric course, will it not one day have to be restrained? Yet in the literature of the resource problem this is the forbidden question.

So what is required is a new way of doing business. This will demand courage and risk. Governments will need advice from people who have experimented and lived with a vision of how the future should be. There are probably few within government who have this knowledge and experience so it may be difficult for them to envision what is needed. In any case they will have their eye on the next election and will want to make decisions that do not scare the horses.

While emissions trading is one of the tools that the government can use to reduce Australia's emissions I must say I'm pretty sceptical that it will do what is necessary. Its a minimalist approach at a time when radical action is required. In any case, by setting such a low target the government has pretty much negated any prospect of reducing emissions. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) proposed by the Government is a badly designed scheme with a weak target which over-compensates polluters at the expense of the community and environment. It also provides compensation and free permits to major polluters and allows my efforts as an individual to be used by them to avoid their responsibilities. Compensation that goes to polluters reduces the resources available to assist householders and clean industries.

For a start, I would like to see a renewable energy feed-in tariff, energy efficiency standards for all buildings, more investment in public transport (there is a ridiculous proposal for instance to remove the rail line from the centre of Newcastle) and renewable energy, a mandatory renewable energy target, comprehensive demand management of water resources, and investment in environmental and the internal and external reasons that discourage individuals for living more sustainably (starting with parliamentarians).

These are positive suggestions. The potential benefits that will flow from the above suggestions are lifestyles based more on quality than quantity, better nutrition, less dependence, less pollution, healthier environment, more innovation and creativity, less mental illness and stress and more fulfilling lives.

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