

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

I listened to Guy Pearse on ABC Radio National on Wednesday night, speaking about his recent article 'Quarry Vision.' It convinced me that emissions trading is flawed and our reliance on coal as a primary energy source and export product in Australia is putting communities and the environment at great risk. Buying carbon offsets in other countries? Who says the governments of those countries will still be around in ten years? Who monitors the purchasing of bits of forest? What minimal effect does this ultimately have on the environment? What cost does the polluter really bear? Almost nothing. Given this, what behaviour change in polluters will the scheme actually achieve? None.

Pearse reckons we can close down the coal industry responsibly within 20 years. While we keep people employed mining coal, we're locking them into a dead-end future which is not fair to them or their families. Why would we deliberately put those families and communities at risk? It's unethical, even un-Australian to set people up in this way.

The global financial crisis has shown us what happens when we don't institute long-term planning. We have an opportunity here to remove our reliance on coal and start building for a sustainable future. Those words, 'sustainable future,' sound a bit tired these days. Please stop for a minute and think about what they mean. They don't mean putting a bandaid solution (emissions trading) in place that will make us feel like we're doing something for the next 20 years, only to discover that in 20 years we're worse off in financial, environmental and community terms than we were when we started. It means genuinely planning for the future, by putting strong emissions reduction targets in place that will actually make a difference. From what I understand, scientists agree that developed countries like Australia need to reduce their emissions by between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020 if we are to avoid runaway climate change. Clearly, the target range of 5-15% is unacceptably low and must be urgently reviewed. Ways of reaching those targets also need to be genuine, and include a transition to renewable energy sources that is not a token effort, but a real achievement.

This is what I want to see Australia doing. I'm not a member of the Greens or any other environmental group - I'm not a 'greenie' who is bothering you with information you probably don't want to hear. I'm an Australian voter, a regular person who doesn't want to see our country continue to make mistakes. We're setting ourselves up for a bigger crisis than the financial one if we fail to act intelligently on this issue. Please listen to the scientists who really know what is happening and be courageous enough to lead Australia in this way.

Annie Hopkins