

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

Reducing emissions is very important for the planet and for our future populations prosperity. What is really needed is an easily understood, easily enacted and absolutely fair system that cannot be artificially manipulated by conflicting interests. Setting a target and sending an appropriate price signal under the right system, should provide a strong framework for all our other policies, such as renewable energy feed-in tariffs and home energy efficiency retrofits, to grow on and flourish. Examples of such a system would be an emissions tax system with 100% dividend return or equivalent such as proposed by James E. Hanson.

However, a badly designed emissions reduction scheme (such as the proposed offset trading system) can become a box rather than a framework, constricting the growth of the zero emissions economy and actively preventing the transformation we need. Better to let the other policies do their job unassisted than hold them back with a bad emissions trading scheme.

The scheme proposed by the Government protects polluters for years into the future by handing out free pollution permits, perverting the intention of emissions trading by protecting the profits of Australia's worst climate offenders instead of encouraging clean competition.

Protecting polluters also unfairly transfers the cost of meeting the target to industries with less lobbying power and to the community at large.

By adopting a flawed & abusable system, along with setting such a weak target, and ensuring that Australia's emissions cannot fall below that level, the scheme will also mean that the efforts of everyone from householders to State Governments to reduce emissions will be helpful only in reducing the price pressure on polluters.

Setting a weak target within this flawed system is likely to see bad investment decisions made, where public and private money is spent on "lower pollution" infrastructure which will need to be swiftly moth-balled and replaced with zero emissions infrastructure when serious science-based targets are adopted.

People often think that any action to reduce emissions, even by as little as 5%, will reduce the risk of climate change. In fact we know that there are tipping points in Earth's systems which, if breached, will send our climate spinning out of control with catastrophic consequences for all of us. Recent scientific evidence significantly raises the risk and likelihood that we will reach one of these tipping points before the middle of this century if immediate action is not taken to curb emissions levels aggressively and uniformly.

If we are to have a reasonable chance of preventing runaway climate change, we must make every effort to avoid these tipping points. That means high-polluting countries like Australia moving towards carbon neutrality as fast as possible, with cuts of at least 40% by 2020.

This would help Australia to become more energy efficient and thus reduce our longterm costs and improve our international competitiveness. In addition--due to a combination of our unique geography (covering almost all climactic zones and environmental conditions) and our technically skilled and diverse population, we are well positioned to capitalise as a country on the unique opportunity to innovate advanced emission reduction technologies which we can then export to the rest of the world. This would allow Australia to potentially reduce unemployment levels, offset the impacts of the global economic crisis and reduce our own greenhouse gas emissions; whilst at the same time we can export our innovative technology and capabilities, improve our operational efficiencies across the board, increase the competitiveness of our corporations and ultimately become a benchmark leader for the rest of the world. Never underestimate the innovative nature of Australians when faced with challenges. As a population we can choose to leverage this as an opportunity or ignore it at our own peril.

Locking in a weak target, refusing to accept cuts of more than 15% by 2020, could undermine global efforts to reach agreement on ambitious targets at the Copenhagen climate conference at the end of the year and would ensure that as a country we miss the opportunity to export more than just mineral wealth in the future.

Everyone is naturally scared of change, especially the largest corporations as they often have spent a significant portion of their time and effort, fine-tuning current business processes based on assumptions of continuity and control. It is important to realise however, that we simply cannot continue operating in the same manner and under the same assumptions as we have in the past - the world is changing. We can embrace the change, and begin the possibly difficult/disruptive, but ultimately rewarding in the longterm, move from being a carbon-negative (yesteryears horse and cart) economy to a carbon-neutral or even positive (yesteryears automobiles) economy. Or, we can bury our heads in the sand and face the longterm consequences of continuing to invest in inefficient and redundant infrastructures and processes whilst the rest of the world overtakes us in terms of economic efficiency and thus prosperity.

I for one, know which option I would rather choose. Unforeseen benefits will emerge from this change; how many of them, will depend upon how quickly and with what attitude we embrace the change that is upon us.

Please look at the science of this situation, not the politics. Listen to the experts who offer their advice to you during this inquiry, listen to the people of Australia and make the right decision in your recommendations.

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