

SUBMISSION TO SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE POLICY

Climate change resulting from global warming is the most significant issue confronting the entire population of the world, more far reaching in its potentially adverse impacts, if inadequately managed, than the current global financial crisis, the “war” against extremism, or any other extremity that mankind has experienced.

If greenhouse gases are not contained to 450 ppm the prospect for our children’s children enjoying other than a most marginalised existence in a world too dreadful to contemplate is ensured.

It is this concern that drives me to make my first submission to any committee of any chamber of any parliament in Australia.

Over the last decade I have endeavoured to become informed through a variety of means. These include the media in all its forms, wide reading from the popular to the scientific (such as the reports of the International Panel on Climate Change), engagement with highly qualified experts, particularly those who come from a scientific and environmental background, government publications, political parties and their platforms, speeches and pronouncements from government ministers and parliamentary members, and even parliamentary debates, the last mentioned being of little value, perhaps “worse than useless”, as some describe the government’s carbon pollution reduction scheme, the subject of this Senate’s inquiry.

Any notion that climate change is not happening, or that it is happening, but not as a result of human action, can be safely ignored. The science is not only “in”, but becomes more compelling month by month, and correspondingly raises the level of need for urgent action.

ADDRESSING THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

REFERENCE 1

- a. The choice of emissions trading as the central policy to reduce Australia 's carbon pollution, taking into account the need to:
 - i. reduce carbon pollution at the lowest economic cost,
 - ii. put in place long-term incentives for investment in clean energy and low-emission technology, and
 - iii. contribute to a global solution to climate change.

The choice between an emission trading scheme and a carbon tax (or some combination of both) is not the main issue. Both approaches are capable of producing the necessary outcome of firstly reducing the growth rate in emissions, and secondly winding back emissions to 350 ppm, a level that is necessary for a sustainable future for planet earth.

Both are capable of meeting the three needs set out above, but only if so designed as to be consistent with the science, and taking into account the urgency that the science clearly demonstrates.

As the government has opted for an emissions trading scheme, an approach supported by the opposition when in government, it seems sensible to concentrate solely on emissions trading.

REFERENCE 2

- b. The relative contributions to overall emission reduction targets from complementary measures such as renewable energy feed-in laws, energy efficiency and the protection or development of terrestrial carbon stores such as native forests and soils.

It is axiomatic that no matter how well designed an emissions trading scheme might be, it alone is incapable of producing the necessary reductions in greenhouse gases to ensure long term sustainability of life on our planet.

If the planet is to be saved it will be through a combination of means, means which will differ from region to region, and from nation to nation, depending upon local conditions.

In a cap and trade carbon pollution reduction scheme the cap must be such as to rapidly shift energy use away from fossil fuels towards complementary measures, including all of those indicated above.

In the short term, government driven energy efficiency across all sectors of the Australian economy offers the best prospects for immediate reductions in the production of fossil based energy.

As the technologies for renewable forms of energy are fully developed in areas such as solar, wind, geo-thermal and tidal, massive investment in delivering the necessary infrastructure is a "no-brainer". (It is indeed a pity that more of the federal government's stimulus spending was not so directed). Research into the capture and retention of carbon in agricultural soils, having demonstrated significant potential, should be driven by government.

REFERENCE 3

- c. Whether the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is environmentally effective, in particular with regard to the adequacy or otherwise of the Government's 2020 and 2050 greenhouse gas emission reduction targets in avoiding dangerous climate change.

The sad fact is that the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, if implemented in its present form, will be incapable of delivering on its 2020-2050 greenhouse reduction targets, and if emulated by more highly populated countries, will ensure that dangerous climate change becomes a fact.

The Scheme is inconsistent with the science, (especially the most recent findings of the Copenhagen Conference in March this year). The cap is too low, and pollution permits are too readily available to heavy pollution industries. In this regard the scheme is emulating the early European schemes which largely failed, and thereby detracted from support for carbon trading schemes.

The cap must be reduced and the targets increased. All licences to pollute should be paid for, thereby driving the move to renewables, while at the same time providing the money for production and installation.

The scheme is inconsistent with the aspirations of the Australian people at large, who place dangerous climate change as the item of most concern, fully realizing that without urgent action there is no worthwhile future for the generations to come.

The scheme is inconsistent with the approach that now seems likely to be undertaken by that other high polluting climate change laggard, the United States of America. President Barack Obama has reversed the position taken by the Bush Administration, and in response the House of Representatives may well be soon considering a bill for a cap and trade scheme to reduce US emissions by 20 percent from 2005 levels by 2020. While details are as yet sketchy, the lesson surely is that Australia runs the risk of being left behind in climate change adaptation.

The scheme by and large gives the impression of "steady as you go" in dealing with Australia's production of green house gases. In this regard two lamentable features are:

- A) The failure to take individual action into account in regard to the cap, thereby negating the well intentioned and sincere effort of individuals, families and in many cases, businesses, to change their behaviours in energy usage.
- B) The ability to use international permits, thereby shifting our obligations off shore.

REFERENCE 4

- d. An appropriate mechanism for determining what a fair and equitable contribution to the global emission reduction effort would be.

Determining an appropriate mechanism for establishing a fair and equitable contribution to global emission reduction is challenging and controversial in its complexity. The relative resources of individual nations become involved, together with consideration of varying stages of economic development. The perception of inequities will be ever present, and perhaps can only be dealt with in a spirit of understanding combined with compensation, or even self sacrifice for the common good.

However in Australia's case, the world's largest polluter in terms of its population, but enjoying one of the highest standards of living in the world, we must be generous enough to agree that our ways of doing things and our current standard of living are not likely to be sustainable into the future.

REFERENCE 5

- e. Whether the design of the proposed scheme will send appropriate investment signals for green collar jobs, research and development, and the manufacturing and service industries, taking into account permit allocation, leakage, compensation mechanisms and additionality issues.

Insofar as the proposed scheme is very much "steady as it goes" (Low cap, ready availability of pollution licences, lack of accounting for individual action within the cap) its ability to send appropriate signals to the market in relation the creation of green collar job, research and development, and the manufacturing and service industries is very limited.

The proper goal of a carbon pollution reduction trading scheme, given the short window of opportunity that exists, must be to phase out reliance on high polluting sources of energy through price signals that will change the way we do things in this country.

This is not to say that it can be achieved immediately, but clear signals would result in an orderly staging.

As the evidence of the downside of climate change becomes more telling, as it does, year by year, even month by month, the rest of the world will not wait for us.

We have the resources, the technology and the support of the masses to be a world leader in climate change.

Standing in our way is the timidity of the Government and the intransigence of the Opposition.

Kevin Haskew