

The Australian people are facing a catastrophe if we do not act to mitigate the threat of climate change. Human society has so far flourished during a period known as the Holocene, during which global mean surface temperatures have varied little, and the sea level has been almost constant. Climate change threatens to disturb this balance, drive up temperatures, raise sea levels, and endanger human civilisation as we know it.

The CPRS legislation indicates a fatal disregard for this scientifically-accepted conclusion. The 5%/15% target is woeful and scientifically inadequate. The compensation to polluters fails to create an incentive or serious price signal that will drive the change that is needed in our society – most worryingly is the compensation given to the coal industry. While the compensation given to EITE industries is expensive, I agree with it in principle. The compensation given to the coal industry is without rationale or justification – James Hansen of the NASA Goddard Institute, amongst many other scientists, justly calls for an end to all coal-burning as a necessary step to addressing global warming. Furthermore, the scheme allows for unlimited international 'carbon credits', that is, businesses can offset their domestic emissions by decreasing emissions in other countries. As I understand it, treasury modelling indicates that Australia's emissions will actually rise, given this provision. While this may seem a technical point, the truth is that we need to not just reduce international emissions, but have a paradigm shift in Australian cities, and move towards a carbon-free future. International exports do not support this.

Also, as you hopefully are aware, Richard Denniss of the Australia Institute makes an irresistible case against the CPRS on the grounds that it ignores the efforts of individuals. In short, emissions reductions undertaken by concerned individuals – say, by installing insulation, or solar hot water - will simply free up permits to be used by others, most likely the big polluters. The 5% target thus represents not only a ceiling, but a floor, and emissions reductions cannot go beneath that in the current scheme.

Addressing climate change is the single most important issue facing the world today. Luckily, we need not address it at the expense of human well-being. Various modelling has shown that stabilising at a lower level of carbon dioxides has a net-cost near zero. Aside from protecting a livable climate, benefits would include: lower rates of the respiratory illness brought about by photochemical smog and airborne pollutants; lowering the strain that these illnesses put on our health system and those costs; reducing oil imports from middle-eastern countries with a history of supporting terrorism – imports that effectively subsidise terror; minimising the other environmental harms associated with fossil fuel mining and production, such as oil spills, coal ash slides, groundwater contamination and wilderness and habitat destruction.

Economic benefits would inevitable flow from this movement. International competitiveness would be increased by greater environmental legislation – countries such as Germany are an example of this, having a high rate of patents of environmental technology. Green jobs would be created, jobs that couldn't be outsourced, and many of these jobs would be in rural areas. Investments in efficiency would shortly pay for themselves, working out to be cost-negative, saving both businesses and individuals money. The extra disposable income for all people would act as a further stimulus to the economy.

The case for climate action, properly understood, is, quite simply, without flaw. In this day and age, every parliamentarian – indeed, every holder of power in every nation – is morally indebted to those who their decisions affect, and this moral obligation demands decisive, inspirational, world-changing and life-saving action against climate change.

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