

## **Submission to Senate Review on Climate Policy for WATCH (Wodonga Albury Towards Climate Health)**

As a Climate Action Group based around the upper catchment of the Murray River, WATCH is acutely aware of the apparent changes in the local climate in recent years, and the serious consequences for communities in this area should these difficult conditions continue. While large variations in weather are quite usual, recent drought and extreme heat appear to be beyond the normal range, such that they must now be considered as possible Climate Change. Were such changes occurring only in Victoria, or Australia, another explanation might be sought, but this is quite evidently not the case. There are many signs that Global changes are taking place and at an accelerating rate, particularly in the oceans, and it is noteworthy that changing conditions in the Indian Ocean are now being linked to our recent extreme weather.

While there are still some prepared to argue otherwise, the overwhelming majority of scientists accept that the Earth's climate and surface temperature is intimately linked to Carbon Dioxide concentration in the atmosphere. This connection is clearly demonstrated by Ice-core analysis over the last 600,000 years, with higher CO<sub>2</sub> levels coinciding with warm interglacial periods. Major cause for concern however is that at no time during this period did CO<sub>2</sub> concentration approach its current level, which exceeds the long term average by some 40%. In addition the rate of increase in CO<sub>2</sub> levels due to the continued burning of Fossil Fuels appears to be accelerating, due perhaps to failure of Ocean Sinks to absorb more.

The only conclusion we can make from these observations, is that we must take immediate and serious action to reduce combustion of fossil fuels to a minimum as fast as possible, to avoid adding further to the atmospheric load, in addition to measures to remove some of that CO<sub>2</sub>, such as reforestation and bio-sequestration.

While such action must obviously be global to be effective, the burden of addressing the problem should fall predominantly on developed countries like Australia for several reasons. Historically we are responsible for the vast bulk of the excess CO<sub>2</sub>, and indeed this pollution is the cost to the world of us becoming "the developed countries". We continue to be the gross emitters per capita, and are only rivaled by China and India because of their huge populations. As

has been pointed out already, a significant part of their emissions also result from manufacturing goods for us to consume. Our disproportionate wealth compared to the less developed world, means we can also easily afford to cut the fat necessary to help us all. Our “obesity epidemic” is of more than symbolic significance. A special consequence of this, our “noblesse oblige”, is that we must take action regardless of other nations, particularly less developed ones. The excuse that Australia can have no effect on its own is both true and totally disingenuous. It is true that our emissions are only 1.5% of global emissions, but we have only 0.3% of total population. But our effect by example could be enormous, particularly at the Climate Summit in Copenhagen, where it will be vital that a new resolve is created to address this crisis, which to some of us begins to look like Humankind’s last stand. Most importantly we do not want to have any spoilers at the party, or for Australia to be that spoiler – the one country that puts its own interest ahead of the others, rather than alongside them. The one country that claims to be a “special case”, like we did at Kyoto.

The Rudd government came to power partly on the back of a vote for action on Climate Change, and encouraged us all by the signing of Kyoto, and by Kevin Rudd’s apparent resolve to tackle this “moral challenge of a generation”. Now 18 months later it is evident that he has not just failed the challenge, but is preparing to commit us to a far worse situation than if he had simply ignored the problem. This is because any real action taken by householders, local governments and state governments to reduce emissions will be effectively cancelled out by the CPRS as it is formulated. What is more, this action on a state level would have resulted in a real reduction in emissions, where the Federal scheme does not even aim to have REAL reductions in emissions till around 2035, planning instead to achieve an accounting reduction only, by offsetting our still increasing emissions in developing economies.

Apart from the dubious morality of “helping” developing countries cut their fat, the chief offset being considered does not actually reduce real emissions either. Stopping deforestation that was “planned” can never do more than halt the rise in emissions. Only Reforestation can actually reduce them. If these offsets are considered reasonable in the global environment, then it must certainly be agreed reasonable that those emissions produced in China manufacturing electronic goods, clothing, garden furniture, even solar panels for Australia

should be added to Australia's budget. China has already suggested this, and may well press for it, if a competitive business atmosphere prevails in Copenhagen, rather than a co-operative collaborative one.

In the light of these remarks, and the complete failure of the Government or its Carbon Pollution Reallocation Scheme to even step up to the mark, it seems almost pointless to dissect the scheme, as it quite evidently has not been designed to address the real problem of *reducing our emissions*. To do this we need a scheme which has a prime objective of *reducing* electricity production using fossil fuel, by *reducing* consumption of electricity in industry and in homes with suitable incentives and disincentives. These could include grants for insulation and solar hot water in homes for example, and taxation to discourage energy-inefficient design. An increasing tariff for excess electricity use should also be considered.

A rapid expansion in production of Renewable energy, such as is happening in Spain and Germany, and for which we are so well placed, should be heavily promoted with government investment, and with the country wide introduction of a Gross Feed-in Tariff. The main objective here is of further reducing emissions from coal fired power stations. Coal is nature's answer to Carbon Capture and Storage, and the more of it we can now leave in the ground the better. Like trying to put the genie back in the bottle, the hair-brained schemes to capture carbon dioxide and bury it are a fairy tale thought up by desperate politicians, which fails any serious test of feasibility. The government's significant investment into CCS research should be immediately diverted into electricity generation schemes for which no research is necessary, and further allocations made for the development of geothermal and solar thermal power such that power from these sources is brought into the grid as soon as possible, and with no hindrance from the existing electricity generation sector.

The CPRS also fails by omission, particularly in the transport sector, and here again there is great room for investment to produce reductions in emissions. A simple tax based on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for passenger vehicles, can start a move to smaller cars powered by diesel or hybrid engines, as happened 15 years ago or more in many European countries. Contrary to claims, we are no different. We do not need big Gas guzzlers or SUVs to potter around town, or to drive out of it. A move by government and public agencies to such vehicles

would also help to set an example. We also need to redirect all the money currently wasted on expanding our road systems into improving public transport systems and encouraging bicycle use. Again our aim should be to *reduce* the number of vehicles on the road, so that we no longer need to expand our road system. On the freight side, apart from moving freight back to rail, thought should be put into ways to *reduce* the amount of goods transported overall.

It may be true that we need to tighten our belts a little, but this could be quite painless if we just cut a little of that fat, and we would probably feel better for it. For far too long we have been eating more than we need and more than is good for us.

It is certainly true that the fattest amongst us need to tighten their belts; sadly the CPRS is not asking them even to keep their belts on, but instead is giving them new and bigger trousers.

This is not to say that elements of the CPRS mightn't be included in a new scheme, but it must be realized that the contribution possible to *reduce* emissions in Australia or globally using emissions trading and carbon offsets is very limited, even without the compensation arrangements and international offsets that make this scheme worse than doing nothing. It is doubtful that even our statistically insignificant 5% cut could be so achieved, other than on paper.

To achieve the sort of cuts in emissions being advised by scientists, and considered by many other countries, we must make basic changes to the way that we generate and use energy, and the longer we fail to understand this and act on it, the harder and more expensive it will become and the less chance we will have of averting a long term global climate catastrophe.

Consequently, while very reluctant to stand in the way of *any* action that recognizes and tries to address the huge problems we face with climate change, WATCH has no alternative to oppose the CPRS in its current form.

David Macilwain (for WATCH)