

Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy

The following observations concern the draft legislation for a Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

Scientific and economic analyses make it clear that (i) much stronger targets for the reduction of CO₂ emissions are needed to stabilise atmospheric levels sufficiently to prevent catastrophic warming, and (ii) the proposed CPRS will not lead to significant reductions in Australia's CO₂ emissions.

Humanitarian obligations

Australia has one of the highest (if not the highest) CO₂ emission per capita in the world. We, and other industrialised nations, have for many decades derived economic benefit from large-scale burning of fossil fuels. Those who stand to suffer the most from global warming are those living in the poorest countries (because of drought, food shortages, sea level rise, and so on)—those who have hardly contributed to CO₂ output, and who have gained little from the activities of polluting industries in developed countries. It is our moral obligation, as well as a political necessity, to take a leadership role in the global community, and to shoulder a large part of the world's effort to minimise CO₂ emissions.

Stronger targets needed

The overwhelming weight of scientific evidence makes it clear that the *minimum* target for CO₂ reduction by 2020 should be 40% of the 1990 levels. 5%, or even 15%, is completely inadequate for the planet, and undermines global efforts to achieve a position that will allow future generations a chance to live comfortably. Why not go even further, and set a 60% target for 2020, and 100% by 2050? It can be done, and there is widespread support in the community.

No free permits

The whole idea of a carbon trading scheme is to change behaviour. Giving free permits to major polluters just encourages them to continue to discharge CO₂ at high levels. It's not as if the need to reduce emissions comes as a surprise to industry: it's now two decades since the Rio conference, and over a decade since the Kyoto conference. If industry hasn't taken steps already to adapt to the need to reduce CO₂ emissions there is obviously a need for very strong incentives to do so now. An effective way to do this is to require *all* industries to purchase permits for *all* of their emissions.

Recognise voluntary actions

The ostensible aim of the CPRS is to reduce CO₂ emissions, but unless the total number of permits is progressively reduced to take account of actions by households, communities and small business the scheme is seriously compromised. As citizens we have acted, and will continue to act, to reduce our carbon footprint, and we will actively encourage our community to do the same. We will be resentful if our actions merely free up permits for the large polluters to make further profits without substantial reductions in their emissions.

It's urgent—let's be serious

The time for half-hearted measures, and for bowing to pressure from the coal and metals industries, is past. The future of human life on our planet is at stake. Let's make Australia an example to the world, and at the same time take our responsibility to humanity seriously, by introducing a carbon trading scheme that really encourages behavioural change on the part of our industry and citizens.

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