

Submission to Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry into Climate Policy. I make this submission as an individual profoundly concerned about the impact of climate change and its threat to life as we know it and as a health care professional.

1. Minimum of 50 % reduction by 2020

The direness of the situation is such that radical and whole systems change is urgently required. The proposed 5 – 15% target is shamefully inadequate. A 50% reduction on 1990 greenhouse pollution levels should be the minimum target. This 2020 target should be achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive set of integrated, inter-sectoral policies operational at every jurisdictional level and every level of society. Enforced and assisted structural change, comprehensive incentives for green industries and pollution reduction strategies along with powerful disincentives for polluters would all be part of the picture. A revised carbon pollution reduction scheme [or a carbon tax] would be an essential component of the range of policy measures necessary.

2. Redesign CPRS to support as much pollution reduction as possible

The design of the proposed Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is seriously flawed. The scheme should not be adopted in its current form. Many Australians are making huge efforts to reduce their carbon footprints. A redesigned greenhouse pollution reduction scheme must make these efforts count and encourage as much and as rapid action as possible. Major polluting industries must play their part. They should not be generously compensated by public monies as the proposed legislation would do. The dangers of anthropomorphic climate change have been known for decades. There has been plenty of time for industries to begin to change. Now is the time for a rapid shift, and one that will be inevitably painful for some. However, the pain of transition will be nothing on the calamity that worst case scenarios of climate change will bring if we continue with business as usual, or with minimal change.

A carbon tax should be considered, along with innovative and well thought through approaches for a newly designed and well crafted emissions reduction scheme. An optimal approach would ensure that every sector commits to directly reducing greenhouse emissions and continues to do so. All Australians - in industry, individually and in their communities – need to be actively engaged in a greenhouse pollution reduction challenge. The more we succeed, the greater the incentive should be to reduce more. To cap the level of acceptable pollution reduction and to encourage emissions trading within this cap clearly fails to do this. In the case of my own household, in the past six months we have installed insulation, solar hot water and photo-voltaic cells, and have made lifestyle changes to reduce travel and minimize the greenhouse impact of our diet. I would like to think that the reductions I have made would contribute to a reduction in greenhouse emissions for Australia as a whole. I feel a sense of betrayal at the possibility that my efforts and sacrifices might enable big polluting industries to pollute more. More seriously, such devaluing of the efforts of individuals and community groups risks disempowering ordinary Australians. Why bother, they will ask. The proposed legislation would bring about such paltry change it would scarcely affect the

rate of climate change; at the same time it could lead to widespread community cynicism, hopelessness and despair – and with it, related mental health and social problems especially for youth.

3. Supported transition to greenhouse friendly economy urgent

Almost on a daily basis, science is revealing that the pace of climate change is more rapid and more serious than previously thought. The consequences of the trajectory we are now on will be catastrophic. I am sure the committee is well acquainted with the science: we are risking a sixth major extinction. The human species itself is at risk, certainly human civilization as we know it is. The situation should be treated more seriously than an ‘at war’ situation. It is a quantum leap that is required – to a new, more sustainable social and economic system.

Change must be rapidly effected at every level. The Federal Government’s climate policy needs to embrace a raft of interrelated and layered measures to support and enable the transition to a greenhouse neutral future as rapidly and smoothly as possibly. A carbon tax or revised pollution reduction scheme would be one strand of such a spectrum of strategies. Policies would also be in place to ensure the following: major investment in and incentives for renewable energy, for energy efficient and green industries; new planning and building codes to prescribe energy efficiency, passive solar designs etc for *all* new commercial, community and domestic development [such should be a condition of all new building supported by the government’s recent stimulus package]; increased government support for community and bio-regional initiatives – transition towns, shifts to ‘green’ industries, community development for sustainability, community orchards and gardens, urban forests, local skills exchanges, etc; education and training programs to provide ‘green skills’ – for trades people, builders, designers, etc; strategies to support and retrain workers no longer required by high polluting industries and to help them relocate to green jobs; major programs for retrofitting existing houses, commercial buildings and government offices; supports for lower income earners and others most disadvantaged by enforced transition to low or no polluting industries and practices; the protection of native forests as carbon stores, the protection of soils and natural systems, and the rehabilitation of degraded eco-systems to be an integral part of climate change amelioration programs. The above points to some of the measures required, it is not an attempt to list all.

There is a wonderful opportunity for a flourishing of community and of the human spirit – for new industries, new enterprises, new skills development, creativity, inventiveness and the fulfilment of human potential. Measures to reduce climate change should be integrated into all other policy areas. They must be integrated with measures to promote community and social health and well-being. Importantly, strategies to address the economic crises must be linked with strategies to address climate change. Both crises can truly be approached as a time of opportunity – there can be a burgeoning of new jobs, creativity and lifestyles which support greater community connection, better support networks, less isolation and alienation, and more daily activities promotive of good physical and mental health. Such needs to be supported by community education programs and artistic endeavours about the dangers of climate change and what can be

done about it along with penalties for behaviours which contribute to climate change [e.g. wasting energy through unnecessary lighting and air conditioning in cities].

The scale of change that is called for – locally and globally - should be seen as comparable to the Industrial Revolution or the Agricultural Revolution. The difference is that the rate of change needs to be much more rapid. In so many ways, the ground is ready for this level of change – individuals, rural and urban communities and many businesses are already aware and initiating climate friendly changes.

4. Call for inspired, visionary and courageous leadership and non-partisanship

A comprehensive set of inter-linked policies and incentives from government, as is being suggested - especially if there were cross bench agreement and cooperation and cooperation between the three levels of government [instigated and led by the Federal government] - would provide the boost necessary to ignite widespread creativity and rapid change. A huge amount can be done tomorrow to reduce greenhouse emissions [simple changes, energy saving activities, etc]. Strong, wise, courageous and visionary leadership can inspire this. To return to the war metaphor, there needs to be a united effort. There is no place for partisan point scoring in the face of the climate emergency. Such is irresponsibility. There is a place for vigorous debate, but only if conducted within an atmosphere of cooperation to work out together the best way forward to ensure minimal future risks for all. It is time for governments to implement wise policies for the long term, and to cease self interested policies aimed at short term election cycles.

5. The cost of not acting must be balanced against the short term economic cost of carbon reduction strategies

Professor Garnaut has sage advice here, as does the Stern Review. The long term impact of climate change will be far more deleterious than the short term economic cost of transition to a greenhouse friendly economy. This is not to minimise the downside, challenges or hardships that must come with the required transition. The reality is that, by definition, a fossil fuel based economy cannot be sustainable. Already we are at a time of peak oil. Coal as a primary source of energy belongs to the past. If we want a safe and secure future, we have no choice but to rapidly shift to a clean and safe energy base – this requires massive investment in new, safe, green and renewable technologies. There is no argument to prop up industries that are destroying the natural systems that sustain life. This will be unpalatable for some but must be seen in the context of risk reduction and the responsibility to tend the conditions that support life for the benefit of future generations.

The run of adverse weather events which have beset Australia this year are just one example of what we could be in for if we fail to sufficiently act. While it is not possible to definitively cite a cause and effect relationship between climate change and any one adverse weather event, it is indisputable that as climate change progresses we will experience more of the heat waves, fires, floods and drought that have savaged Australia this year. We know that our continent is and will continue to be particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. How does one adequately cost the loss of life, the suffering, the destruction of property through bushfires and floods, the loss of agricultural

production, etc. as has occurred this year? Where will we continue to find the resources to provide the emergency relief as the incidence of such terrible events becomes more frequent and more intense, and as our river systems continue to degrade? Surely such costs need to be weighed against the short term economic costs of urgently needed pollution reduction measures.

6. Australia's contribution to global action

Only by taking strong action at home can Australia have credibility on the international stage. Our current per capita greenhouse emissions are shameful. We need to show by example and to set in place strong targets and clear strategies to reach those targets. Only then will we have the right and responsibility to negotiate for strong international measures at Copenhagen and beyond. I submit that we must do this. This is a global emergency. My heart sings at the thought of Australia leading the way through courageous actions to support and guide the social and economic transition to a greenhouse friendly future, to support the development and export of new, safe, green technologies, to establish exemplar sustainable cities, towns and rural industries and to strongly negotiate and mediate for international commitments and actions to ensure reduced emissions on a global scale and with it, the urgent steps necessary to prevent global calamity.

Thank you.

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