

As a young person and a representative of the young people of WA in both The Western Australian Secondary Students' Association and the YMCA Youth Parliament 2009, I feel betrayed by the Rudd Government on the issue of climate change.

I am a member of the Young Labor Left in the ACT, and have supported the ALP in every election I have been witness to, however, now I feel that I, and others of my generation, have been forgotten.

The targets set by the Government are pitiful. While I admit they do reduce our emissions to a comparatively acceptable level, we must do more than that. It is the duty of Australia, as a country which is sufficiently technologically advanced, politically stable and economically sound to lead the world on issues such as this. If we do not lead, who will? There is no global impetus to save the world for future generations. We must provide it.

I therefore recommend that the Government reconsider its emissions reduction targets, and aim for the radical 50% by 2020 proposed by GetUp! and other organisations devoted to saving our environment for the future.

I also suggest that the concept of an ETS is faulty. Emissions are not commodities. They are the unwanted by-products of outmoded and inefficient energy, automotive, manufacturing and mining industries. If the global governance structure had acted on the concerns of environmental scientists when they were first raised these industries would not have been permitted to develop badly designed technologies, reliant on dirty and finite fuel sources.

Sadly they did not. Now we must. It should be the first priority of government to rejuvenate and redirect the CSIRO, with a funding injection of AU\$100billion, in order to do the real research into renewable energy sources. So often we hear from business (primarily polluters) that renewable energy technologies aren't ready - can't generate sufficient baseload power, aren't cost effective, will cost thousands of jobs, etc - and can't be ready in time. The first of these is true. Our renewables sector is vastly underfunded, ignored by successive governments at the urging of the business lobby. The second of these statements is a lie, and a defeatist one at that. With a sufficient funding injection we can easily have renewable technologies ready to replace our national power infrastructure within the next ten years.

Governments love to be 'world leaders' and 'front runners'. They love 'innovation' and 'technological success'. Well, here's the opportunity. Not only will a large scale investment in renewable energy save our country and our planet widespread, large-scale damage, it will also generate fantastic press for whichever party takes the plunge.

It is often argued that we can not move away from coal and gas fired energy, as it will cause drastic job loss. To some extent this is true, but that job loss is inevitable; if Australia (and the world) continues to burn fossil fuels the resulting environmental disaster will cause universal job loss; if there is no environmental disaster we will be forced to move away from coal, oil and gas when global supplies run out - we have already reached peak oil and coal.

Job loss can be minimised by implementation of a world-class job transition and retraining system. There will always be workers needed to man power stations, and to work in primary and other blue collar industries, all that is needed is reskilling. I grant you there will be fringe losses - the ageing members of the workforce, those less able and less originally qualified - but surely, this small amount is preferable to ecological catastrophe?

To begin the transition process total conversion to gas fired power stations should be achieved. Gas releases far lower levels of harmful gas into our atmosphere than coal does. Those installing new kitchens, water heating, heating and other gas-replaceable electricity systems during this period should be encouraged to install solar panels or miniature wind turbines, in preference to mains power dependence and, if this is not an option, be pushed toward a gas option. Using coal-fired electricity to

heat water or cook, rather than burning gas, puts about four times as much carbon dioxide into the air.

However, a far greater emphasis should be placed on decentralised power generation – a simple, economical and efficient means of fast conversion to renewable energy sources. Subsidies for installing solar cells, wind turbines and other realistic renewable energy supplements should be raised to between 80 and 100%. Households should be encouraged to use the mains grid only as a backup energy supply. This should be coupled with a drive toward greater household self-sufficiency in terms of water supply (especially rainwater tanks) and even food production, if possible, in order to minimise the over-large environmental footprint of the modern Australian.

During the research and production stages of the conversion to renewable energy, the Government must not be idle. The mindset of both Australians and our companies must be fundamentally altered. At present we take our resources; food, water, energy, etc, almost for granted. This must change. Besides investing in renewable energy, the government must drastically revalue consumables. Energy, food, luxury goods, etc., etc., all are far too cheap. An excellent example of this is water.

Water is Australia's most precious resource, and yet we can buy a litre of it for half a cent. Low water prices encourage excessive water consumption. Australians are using water excessively due to inappropriate pricing. This has diverted water away from natural ecosystems such as wetlands, depleted aquifers, and some drought affected catchment areas, requiring water to be trucked in. Higher water prices would ration limited water supplies in a way that favoured those water uses that added more value to the water. Low-value-adding water uses, that could no longer be justified given the higher price, would drop out.

Higher prices for catchment water favour water recycling. Where water recycling schemes have to compete with catchment water - from rivers, lakes, reservoirs and underground aquifers - subsidies for catchment water discourage water recycling, which if implemented widely, would do much to conserve often limited catchment water supplies.

The same can be said of electricity. We can buy electricity far too cheaply. To rectify this, I propose instituting a carbon tax, in order to make Australians realise the true value of the electricity they use - and the damage to the environment that the coal- and gas-fired generation of that energy does.

Australia presently faces a large trade deficit. The goods we import are predominantly those whose production has become economically impossible through globalisation. Not only do imported commodities have a carbon footprint far in excess of locally made produce, they also weaken our economy - making us dependent on finite primary resources in order to pay our ever increasing debt. A carbon tax would combat these problems. It would raise the prices of imported goods to the point where it becomes economically tenable to once again produce goods locally, thus encouraging Australian consumers to purchase local produce and, cyclically, encourage Australian industry. Price parity between local and imported products will be far easier to achieve.

We must also invest in Australian industry, especially the knowledge and research industries. At present our most marketable commodity, besides primary produce, is people. We have bright, talented individuals in demand all over the world, in every strain of life. We must play upon this and turn Australia into the veritable knowledge bank of the world. On top of this, we must rebuild our secondary manufacturing industries, in order to value add to our products for both local and international consumption – rather than shipping our ore and other raw materials to China.

On the concept of an emissions trading scheme, and the CPRS itself:

The emissions trading scheme will not help reduce energy consumption, nor, in reality will it ensure that polluters move toward more environmentally friendly, less emissions intensive methods of production. All it does is provide a semblance of action in order to allow the government to pretend to be changing the face of Australia's ludicrously large per capita environmental footprint.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) currently proposed by the Government is a badly designed scheme that will do more harm than good. The scheme design over-compensates polluters at the expense of the community and environment.

Setting a strong target with a well-designed scheme, including a carbon tax and radically new investments in research, will ensure Australia does its fair share to avoid dangerous climate change, and it will also help refocus our economy to take advantage of new growth industries in renewable energy.

Because the CPRS imposes a floor beyond which emissions cannot fall, the action individuals and small businesses take to reduce energy will not reduce Australia's total greenhouse emissions further than the Government's weak target of 5-15%. In fact their action will only make room for industry to increase their emissions under that cap.

To conclude, this submission recommends:

An increase in funding to the CSIRO of AU\$100bill, over 5 years.

A regearing of the CSIRO to investigate the greatest threat to this country in the past three hundred years; climate change.

The implementation of a Carbon Tax, dependant on Carbon Footprint estimation techniques.

An increase in the emissions reduction target to 50% by 2020.

That Australia takes a global leadership role in developing radical emissions reduction schemes, especially by setting examples and dispersing knowledge.

The tightening of the CPRS, to penalise even trade exposed industries, especially coal exporters.

An 80-100% subsidy of decentralised renewable power generation technologies.

Investment in Australian knowledge industry.

Investment in local value-adding to Australian primary resources.

A plan to encourage household self-sufficiency.

Yours sincerely,

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Secretary,

The Western Australian Secondary Students' Association