

8th April 2009

Gianni Frigo

The Secretary  
Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA  
ACT 2600

Dear Sir

I am writing to you because I am very concerned about Global Warming and particularly about the impacts of climate change on people living in developing countries.

Scientists are warning of the threat of dangerous climate change, with anything beyond a 2°C increase in global temperature potentially catastrophic for Australia and many of our Asian, African and Pacific neighbours.

I have read that at an emergency climate summit in Copenhagen, scientists agreed that "worst case" scenarios were already becoming a reality and that, unless drastic action was taken soon, "dangerous climate change" was imminent. More than 2500 leading environmental experts agreed on a statement that called on governments to act before the planet becomes an unrecognisable — and, in places, impossible — place to live.

In a strongly worded message that, unusually for academics, appealed directly to politicians, they said there was "no excuse for inaction" and that weak and ineffective governments must stand up to big business and "vested interests". Steps should be "vigorously and widely implemented", they said, to reduce greenhouse gases. Failure to do so would result in "significant risk" of "irreversible climatic shifts."

This plea came as Lord Stern, the former chief economist of the World Bank whose report two years ago drew attention to the possible results of global warming, told the conference that unless politicians grasped the gravity of the situation it would be "devastating".

He said that increases in average temperatures of 6 degrees by the end of the century were an increasing possibility and would produce conditions not seen on Earth for more than 30 million years. He claimed, that could mean massive rises in sea level, whole areas devastated by hurricanes and others turned into uninhabitable desert, forcing billions of people to leave their homelands. The implications of this would mean extended conflict, social disruption, and even war. He also told the summit that politicians continued to underestimate the impact of climate change and that scientists needed to redouble their efforts to get them to understand.

I commend our Government for having finally signed the Kyoto Protocol last year. As you must know, under the Kyoto Protocol, developed nations have to cut emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels by 2008-12. But during the meeting scientists frequently spoke about how former assumptions on the risks have had to be redrawn. They have repeatedly warned higher-than-expected emissions have meant temperatures will rise at rates far higher than thought just a few years ago. This will lead to disastrous sea-level rises, melting of the ice caps and acidification of our oceans. The weather will also change, scientists warned, resulting in destruction of the rain forests, widespread droughts and flooding. We can't deny that we can already see this happening.

Many small island nations would be swamped. Billions more people around the world would also be affected by flooding, others by water shortages. The impacts of this would mean huge increases in hunger through crop failures, and up to half a billion more people exposed to malaria than are today.

The CSIRO also has been warning for years about the vulnerability of the

Asia-Pacific region to the impact of climate change without substantial action from Australia. In its report, *Climate Change in the Asia-Pacific region*, the CSIRO warned that the region was particularly vulnerable to coastal communities being inundated by rising seas, loss of wetlands and coral bleaching, increases in disease and effects on regional economies. You can imagine what the projected possible rise of sea levels of 1 to 2 metres by 2100 means to the Republic of Maldives, which sits just 1.5 metres above sea level. Other countries in our region are similarly threatened, and are looking to Australia to take action to give them the best chance of survival.

The 2500 inhabitants of the Carteret Islands (120 kilometres north-east of Bougainville in the Pacific Ocean) have become one of the first “environmental refugees”. Since 2005 due to rising sea levels, these people have been forced to slowly relocate to Bougainville.

The greatest injustice of climate change is that its effects are falling most heavily on the poor. People who bear the least responsibility for causing the problem and have the least capacity to deal with it.

It is imperative therefore that we do everything in our power to keep global temperature rises below 2°C.

The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has indicated that to keep warming between 2 - 2.4 °C, rich developed countries like ours need to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions between 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and 80-95 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050.

This is why the Prime Minister's recent announcement of a 5-15 per cent emissions reduction target by 2020 appears woefully inadequate, and does not reflect the sense of urgency which the science tells us is needed. As the highest per capita greenhouse gas polluter in the OECD – and a

country that has become very wealthy releasing these emissions – I believe Australia is avoiding its responsibility to take strong action and prevent worsening climate change impacts from threatening the lives and livelihoods of millions of people in the developing world.

Australia, as with most western countries has greatly contributed to the problem of global warming, and we have an obligation to lead by example in reducing our own emissions, and to help it's poorer neighbours to cope with its impacts. Many of our neighbours lack the infrastructure to tackle even day to day social issues, let alone resources to respond to this crisis. We should be assisting our neighbours to cope with climate change by committing to pay our fair share of a United Nation's global adaptation fund. (A portion of the revenue raised from Australia's proposed Emissions Trading Scheme is a possible funding source.)

Australia needs to adopt a national framework to urgently reduce its emissions by a figure far greater than what our government has previously proposed. I would be proud if we could set an example in our region and the world and set a target much closer to that suggested by the IPCC.

I'm asking you to do this because I care about how climate change is now affecting the poorest people in the world, and is affecting us as well.

I apologise for the lateness of my submission and for it being so long, but I feel very strongly about this subject, and I felt the need to make these points.

I thank you for taking the time to read my letter and hope that you will consider my suggestions.

Yours Sincerely



Gianni Frigo