

To Senators on the Senate Select Committee on Climate Policy,

The growing scientific assessment is that the long-term level of CO₂ in the atmosphere should be less than 350ppm. We are currently at 387ppm and climbing. If we don't take the most drastic action, the planet will be beyond mitigation and adaptation - it will simply be unliveable as we enter runaway climate change. This is what the best informed scientists are saying, not the lobbyists from polluting industries or environmentalists. The government must first of all front up to the Australia's and the world's people and acknowledge this.

The current scheme is seriously flawed and disqualifies itself as any attempt at compromise or balance between competing interests. By comparison, a liberal democracy such as Australia does not 'get the balance right' over human rights by compromising between racists and those who believe in racial equality. Although this scale of environmental threat is something new for our democracy, we cannot barter with our climate security. The parameters of the politics here should not be set by the day-to-day politics of compromise. The reduction targets must be set by the science (as the government sometimes claims but then ignores).

The second serious flaw is that emission cuts are potentially not within our national borders. Carbon saved nationally or internationally might be the same in the strict sense of it, but the political and economic efforts will be warped by allowing 100% to be made overseas. We need to change the way we act at home. We should be saving our own forests as carbon stores, not simply expecting Indonesians to save theirs.

The argument in favour of allowing 100% of reductions to be made and traded on a global basis might make sense according to free trade rhetoric, but then the government proceeds to hand out massive subsidies to the heaviest polluters at home, and exempts transport. This is a strange combination of free trade and protectionism, which only adds up to weaken Australia's national efforts.

And then the way the reduction targets works additionally means that individual efforts to reduce emissions just makes the permits for heavy industry cheaper. These reductions should be added to the annual reductions and be counted separately from the trading scheme.

My hope is that the final scheme will recommend at least 40% reductions (ideally closer to 50%) of national emissions by 2020, start with minimal free permits and phase them out by no later than 2015, and include transport and agriculture from its commencement. Money raised from the scheme should be used for normal redistribution of income (rather than cash bonuses and exemptions on energy bills) and funding mandatory renewable energy targets and efficiency measures. Only when a global scheme is announced at the Copenhagen Conference in December should any amount of our reductions be attributed to overseas savings.

There is only the most depraved fudging of figures that argues Australia has a responsibility to do anything less. Our emissions are the highest per capita, and our historic contribution is very high also. Only once we announce true and strong targets can we begin to compare ourselves to China, India, Brazil or even Europe.

The government got a very clear mandate at the last election to take the strongest possible action on climate change. The world also needs every bit of encouragement and persuasion if the Copenhagen talks are to amount to any post-Kyoto agreement that stands a chance of saving us from ourselves.

yours sincerely,

Paul Cuttler.