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The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
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Re.: Inquiry into Australia's future oil supply and alternative transport fuels

Dear Madam/Sir,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very important issue.

I am very pleased to see the parliament taking a serious look at it, as it could have profound effects on our whole society, as well as the natural environment. I have been very concerned that the peak of oil production is probably very close and yet we seem to have made no contingency plans.

I would strongly urge all levels of government, broader society and individuals to take the following steps:

- Dramatically improve the promotion and funding of public transport and non-motorised transport such as walking and cycling. This could include, for example:
 - Promoting walking, riding or catching buses to school, via education campaigns, “walking school buses”, free bus services, good bicycle facilities, traffic wardens, car-free zones near schools, bike lanes etc. Educating our children to walk and to use bikes and public transport is incredibly important, possibly the most important thing we can do. We have to reverse the trend of children being driven to school and never learning to be independent, get enough exercise, or get anywhere without driving.
 - Changing tax laws to remove any incentives for cars, e.g., tax advantages for cars as part of employment packages.
 - Removing incentives for 4WDs, with the possible exception of genuine rural use.
 - Shifting the balance of government funding somewhat away from roads for cars and trucks and into light rail, heavy rail, buses, bike lanes etc.
 - Significantly tightening regulation of the trucking industry, with the added benefit of reducing the horrendous pressure on truck drivers to drive long hours and long distances, often with drugs to keep them awake.
 - Modifying tax or regulatory incentives or requirements encouraging the provision of parking spaces in commercial buildings so that more encouragement is given to bicycle parking and investigating whether there is any equivalent method of encouraging public transport use.
 - Increasing the area of car-free zones in city centres and sub-centres.
 - Increasing provision of secure bicycle parking.
 - Increasing the frequency and reliability of public transport services.
 - Improving integration between public and non-motorised transport services, e.g., sensible timetabling to allow people to move from bus to train, bike and other parking at train stations.

- Planning to prefer public and non-motorised transport – giving these other modes priority over private cars by such means as bike lanes, bus lanes, pedestrian lights with higher priority than traffic lights etc.
 - Design urban and suburban expansion and redevelopment with non-motorised and public transport as the default choice for transport, with private motorised transport seen as the exception rather than the rule.
 - Increase funding and support for research into alternative energy generation, including alternative transport fuels.
 - Improve non-transport energy efficiency and reduce demand. Although most such energy is not produced from fuels which could directly be used for transport, I believe that increasing energy efficiency across the economy will make unnecessary the use of any transport fuel for electricity generation and will allow possible use of electricity for some alternatives to our current transport fuels, such as hydrogen fuel cells.
- There are many steps which could be taken to reduce overall demand for non-transport energy, including:
- Seriously addressing energy efficiency in housing and commercial buildings, including making all new buildings at least 5 star, and investigating retrofitting of existing buildings as they are renovated.
 - Increasing the mandatory renewable energy target to perhaps 20% rather than the current paltry 2%.

We also need to make contingency plans so that if fuel does become much more expensive or harder to get, the areas of our economy which most need it, can get it. For example, fuel should be reserved for agriculture rather than for commuting via private car.

I also think it is vital that we start to reorient our measures of success in society so that we do not regard an increasing GDP per capita as the hallmark of success. Rather we should be looking at alternative measures such as the Human Development Index and the ecological footprint. Better forms of measurement will (should?) help us make more rational decisions about priorities for investment and other forms of effort.

Please let me know when the results of the enquiry are available for viewing.

Yours sincerely,

David Wanless.

Addendum:

As a commuter cyclist for many years, I am very aware of the problems facing Australian cyclists due to poor provision of bike lanes and secure bike parking, but most importantly, poor training and attitude of many car drivers.

I have been inspired by the many examples of societies which have significantly better provision for cycling. As examples, see

http://www.earth-policy.org/Indicators/Bike/Bike_data.htm

http://www.itdp.org/PR/bogota_rev.html