

Climate Change is Here Now

(Cont'd from p.3)

Peak Oil: There is increasing evidence that world oil production will peak in the near term, resulting in ever-diminishing availability and affordability of petroleum-derived commodities and goods, including petrol, fertilisers, pesticides and aviation fuel. It is evident that world natural gas supplies may also soon peak as a result. The Australian Labor Party has warned that while production and subsequent greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels such as oil and gas diminishes, the demand for more heavily polluting energy sources such as coal will increase.

Failure to adopt renewable energy and research into other viable alternatives is also resulting in a knee jerk reaction by governments to endorse the use of what is now being promoted as environmentally friendly nuclear power stations, despite the fact that the elimination of the waste from nuclear facilities has not been resolved and remains a clear danger to society.

Effects on Australia: Australia is especially vulnerable to the effects of greenhouse gas because we are drought prone and our environment, including tropical rainforests and Kakadu, is so fragile. With a warming of even one to two degrees the CSIRO says the Murray-Darling Basin, the nation's food bowl, would suffer a drop of up to 25% in its river flow with the agriculture to suffer accordingly.

The CSIRO also predicts that there will be less rainfall in the south and east of Australia, a rise in the number of torrential downpours, higher wind speeds and rising sea levels. The predictions discussed here assume that the trends we have seen towards the end of the last century continue. However an even more dramatic change could be in store. Historical records trapped in ice cores provide a picture of the climate over the past 250,000 years and show that gradual warming can suddenly change to abrupt cooling. It seems that when a complex system like the Earth's climate reaches the limits of its ability to adapt to change it suddenly flips into a totally different state. Thus, the global warming that we are currently experiencing could suddenly become a global cooling, which would have even more devastating impacts than those envisaged in the current scenario.

The results of the Greenhouse Effect threaten to destroy Australia's biodiversity. One definition of the word 'biodiversity' is that it is the abundance of all life forms, i.e., the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, their genes and the terrestrial and aquatic communities in which they live. In other words, it feeds and clothes us, gives us clean air and water and protects us from illness.

Action needed: It is clear that governments, industry and the community must do all we can to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as a matter of urgency. Because the gases lie in the atmosphere for up to 200 years, global warming is already locked in. We have a duty to protect future generations as well as ourselves. We must institute a substantial tax on the emissions of carbon dioxide that are driving global warming. Cool produces five times as much carbon dioxide as gas, so needs to be taxed differently. We must protest the Federal Government's recent Energy White Paper: "A Coal Future for Australia - Australia's energy future lies in further investment into the coal and oil industry." There should be no new coal-fired power stations. Renewable energy needs to be massively expanded and Australia should lead the world.

With 6.4 billion people on the planet, our per capita emission of greenhouse gases must be constrained. As stated by U.S. senior energy analyst, Charles T. Maxwell, "By elimination, if not by wisdom, we will eventually turn to a massive national and international conservation effort. Whenever we confront this reality, the resulting program surely will require many years of investing vast amounts of capital... Without discipline, mental and physical preparedness and an intelligent selection of priorities conceived early enough to keep us from wavering, we will not pass the oncoming test."

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