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IPCC climate alarm advocacy has failed: what's Plan B?

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The emissions trading scheme that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd presented in December is now a nasty headache for the Government. Its problems are both presentational and substantive. More and more, the ETS looks like a costly and ineffective lemon. And there seems nothing in the Government's toolbox of ideas to fix it or replace it with a better model. It is another great "Emperor's New Clothes" moment in Australian public policy-making. Rudd's and Turnbull's advisers do not seem to be giving them all the facts.

— **Tom Kevin**, *Canberra Times*, 24 February 2009.

Introduction

As Dorothea Mackellar foreshadowed, Australia needs to possess a sensible climate policy as much as any country on the planet. Yet recent advertisements run by the federal government, at a cost of $13.9 million, make it clear that current "climate policy" is concerned with addressing hypothetical, human-caused global warming rather than the realities of everyday Australian climate variability. In truth, we don't have a national climate policy but an imaginary global warming policy instead.

All competent scientists accept (i) that global climate has always changed, and always will; (ii) that human activities (not just carbon dioxide emissions) definitely affect local climate, and have the potential, summed, to measurably affect global climate; and (iii) that carbon dioxide is a mild greenhouse gas. The true scientific debate, then, is about none of these issues, but rather about the sign and magnitude of the global human effect, and its likely significance when considered in the context of natural climate change. The fact that scientific opinion is strongly divided over this issue is not unusual, and is a healthy rather than unhealthy state of affairs.

In February this year, a number of events conspired to bring the government's planned carbon dioxide taxation intentions (aka the White Paper on a "Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme") to the forefront of public

debate. Like the Green Paper by Minister Penny Wong that preceded it — and which managed to squeeze no fewer than seven scientific errors into its first sentence — the White Paper is predicated upon unvalidated, speculative computer models which project that human carbon dioxide emissions will cause dangerous global warming, as widely promulgated by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

The events that concentrated the public's attention were, first, the continuing deterioration in the global and Australian economies, and, second, the co-visitation of massive monsoonal flooding in northern Australia and catastrophic bushfires in Victoria. Other potent background issues, known to many commentators, include the utter failure of the Kyoto Protocol to impact on climate change; the collapse in February of the European carbon dioxide trading market for a second time, with prices falling to euro 8/tonne; and the failure also of carbon dioxide taxation to produce a fall in emissions in early-mover countries like Norway. Emissions trading or carbon dioxide taxes are self-evidently costly, regressive, produce financial instability, and at any foreseeable price level are ineffectual in achieving their aim of reducing emission levels.

By mid-February, these various matters had caused an outbreak of editorial sermonising in Australian metropolitan papers. Staff writers laid especial emphasis on the need for the government to re-examine the merits of a direct carbon dioxide tax instead of the foreshadowed market trading system. *The Australian,* for example, urged that "We need to hear other ideas on greenhouse gas reduction", thoughtlessly assuming it to be self-evident that any such reduction would be a public or environmental good.

Recalling that the global average temperature has actually cooled over the last 10 years despite an increase in carbon dioxide of around 5 per cent — information which all on its own falsifies the hypothesis of dangerous human-caused greenhouse warming — this ferment of press discussion managed to miss the main point in truly breathtaking fashion. For the key question, of course, is not by WHAT mechanism carbon dioxide is to be taxed but rather WHY it should be taxed at all. We are, after all, talking about an ecologically beneficial trace gas that forms the base of almost the entire planetary food chain, and which currently exists at atmospheric starvation levels of only 380 ppm compared with up to 10 times that concentration and more during the preceding 600 million years of multi-cellular life on Earth.

Which brings us back to the reminder that Mother Nature has just delivered to all Australians about the power and danger of natural climatic events such as our recent floods and bushfires, even at current carbon dioxide levels. These catastrophes typify the sort of unpredictable, extreme climate events that have always been, and remain, part and parcel of living on a dynamic planet. Their occurrence reinforces the pressing need to develop a climate **Plan B**, comprising policies that deal

with the certain future recurrence of dangerous natural climate events in Australia. For climate **Plan A**, the squandering of money on futile attempts to "stop" a speculative human-caused warming that has yet to be measured, has clearly failed.

Meaning of the term climate change

The phrase "climate change" has come to have several partly contradictory meanings in public discourse. This greatly inhibits clear discussion of the issue in the public domain. Two main meanings are current.

Scientific. Climate change is used as a descriptive term with no connotations of causation, and thus encompasses both natural and human-caused change. This is the usage preferred both by IPCC scientists and by most of the greater number of independent, non-IPCC scientists.

Causatory. Climate change is used in a restricted way, and implies a human causation without specification of the magnitude of any human effect with respect to the dominant natural change. This is the usage of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), to which the IPCC reports, of non-governmental environmental organisations and of most media commentators and therefore the general public.

Scientists who provide dispassionate reviews of global warming alarmism are often accosted with questions like: "*Don't you believe in climate change, then?*" In reality, this question is sloppy code for "*Don't you believe that dangerous global warming is being produced by human carbon dioxide emissions*?". Far from being idle, the distinction between these two meanings is mission critical for logical analysis. A primary reason for the existing public confusion about the global warming issue is that the two main meanings of "climate change", and especially the surrogacy of the second for "dangerous human-caused global warming", are used in the debate by environmental alarmists in ways intended only to advance their own cause.

Scope of natural climate variation

Natural climate change occurs on a range of time scales from millions of years down through millennial and centennial scales to the 11-year sunspot cycle and the several-year El Niño-La Niña oscillation. With respect to these climate changes, extensive geological databases (including lake and ocean sediment and polar ice-cap cores) and meteorological records show the following.

Over the recent geological past, the global average temperature on the planet has varied between 2-3 deg. C warmer and 6-8 deg. C cooler than today. Changes between colder and warmer climatic states have often taken place rapidly, in a matter of a few years to a few decades. The reasons for many of these rapid changes are far from fully understood because of the complexity of the interacting

oceanographic and meteorological processes that are involved.

The Earth's atmospheric and oceanic conditions have been characterised by instrumental measurement for only about 150 years. The best available meteorological records show that there has been no significant net global warming since 1958 (the start of the weather balloon radiosonde record), nor since 1979 (the start of the satellite microwave sensing record) apart from a small step of about 0.2 deg C across the 1998 El Niño event. And, most recently of all, since 1998, global temperature stasis and gentle cooling have occurred. Tellingly, since 1958 there has been an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide, partly due to human emissions, of more than 20 per cent. That there has been no concomitant increase in global temperature invalidates the IPCC hypothesis of dangerous global warming being caused by these emissions.

It is clear that a warmer planet than today's is far from unusual. It is also clear that climate changes naturally all the time, and that, when compared with the ancient climate record, temperatures during the late 20th century were neither particularly high nor particularly fast-changing. In short, there is no strong evidence in support of the notion that the Late 20th-Century Warming, irrespective of what might have caused it, was unusual in its magnitude or rate of change. The idea implicit in the infamous "hockey-stick" graph of Michael Mann and his co-authors, which has dominated much public discussion — that climate was stable (or constant) prior to the industrial revolution, after which human emissions have rendered it unstable — is simply fanciful, despite its avid promulgation in the IPCC's Third Assessment Report.

Circumstantial evidence for human-caused global warming

Earth is a dynamic planet. Its systems are constantly changing, and its lithosphere, biosphere, atmosphere and oceans incorporate many complex, homoeostatic, buffering mechanisms. Changes occur in all aspects of local climate, all the time and all over the world. Geological records show that climate also changes continually through deep time. Change is what climate does, and the ecologies of the natural world change concomitantly, in parallel.

Daily reports appear in the media about changes in many and varied aspects of earth's natural systems which are asserted to be controlled by, or linked to, human-caused global warming. These include, *inter alia*, changes in atmospheric composition, atmospheric aerosol load, global and regional ice volume, the frequency and intensity of storms, patterns of precipitation and drought, sea-level and the ranges or abundances of individual organisms and their ecological habitats.

All these matters are, of course, proper topics for concern, as a result of which all are being subjected to intensive research. However, to date no empirical study has established a certain link

between changes in any of these things and human-caused global warming. When considering such changes, therefore, the parsimonious null hypothesis is that an observed change is due to natural causes unless and until there is direct evidence otherwise. Literally thousands of peer-reviewed papers contain data on natural climate change that is consistent with this null hypothesis, which has yet to be significantly invalidated.

To summarise, the various lines of indirect evidence for "climate change" that are commonly discussed in the media are at least as consistent with natural change as they are with human-forced change. The evidence for attributing changing phenomena such as storm intensity, global ice volume and sea-level to a human cause is at best circumstantial. Despite intensive research, no necessary connection with human causation has been established for any major global climate-related phenomenon. Conversely, and consistent with the null hypothesis, plausible natural explanations exist for all changes that have been described so far.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

The IPCC was established in 1988 in order to advise whether human activity, and especially carbon dioxide emissions, might cause dangerous climate change above and beyond natural change. The question was an entirely sensible one to ask, though in retrospect it is clear that the creation of a costly new international bureaucracy was not a good way to try to answer it.

The IPCC has now summarised a large body of modern science that is relevant to climate change, publishing its results in four successive Assessment Reports in 1990, 1995, 2001 and 2007. These reports contain much excellent analysis and discussion, but there are nonetheless severe problems with the partial way in which the IPCC prepares its scientific summaries, as has been detailed in several papers by Melbourne climate analyst John McLean. It is particularly important to note that the Summary for Policymakers (SPM) section that accompanies each major report, and which is heavily relied upon by bureaucrats and politicians, is approved line by line by senior bureaucrats. Thus the SPM is actually a political document in which the science conclusions cannot be relied upon.

Humans have a demonstrable (i.e., measurable) effect on local climate, which is sometimes warming (e.g., the urban heat island effect) and sometimes cooling (e.g., land-clearing and cropping). Adding these effects all over the globe, therefore, must result in a global human climate signal. However, the magnitude, and even the sign, of this global signal remains unknown. The IPCC has now presented four major assessment reports since 1990. Over this period, it is estimated that more than $50 billion has been expended by Western governments on global warming-related science and policy issues. This research has supported literally thousands of skilled scientists in their search for a measur-

able human effect on recent climate change. Despite this massive expenditure of time, money and research effort, no global human climate signal has ever been isolated or measured. Its magnitude is therefore small, and it must lie obscured within the noise and variation of natural climate change. The IPCC's prescient 2001 statement remains true today:

> The fact that the global mean temperature has increased since the late 19th century and that other trends have been observed does not necessarily mean that an anthropogenic effect on the climate system has been identified. Climate has always varied on all timescales, so the observed change may be natural. A more detailed analysis is required to provide evidence of a human impact.

The inadequacy of current Australian "climate policy"

The current federal government's climate policy, like that of the previous Coalition government, rests heavily upon IPCC science advice, and accepts without question that dangerous human-caused warming is underway or will occur shortly. For example, enquiries to either state or federal ministers about the matter are invariably met by form-letter answers, of which the following is typical:

> The Queensland Government, along with the Australian Government and governments around the world, supports the findings of the IPCC, which is the world's leading authority on climate change. The IPCC advises governments and others interested in climate change with an objective source of information about climate change, based on peer-reviewed scientific literature.
>
> ... Alternative views have been largely discredited. Various propositions put forward are not supported by the peer-reviewed science, including: that global warming is not a real issue; that humans have not caused warming; that temperature rises have been exaggerated; and that increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide do not cause global warming.

The sound of straw men clapping in the background is deafening.

The Garnaut Report and the Wong Green Paper also took as their starting points the correctness of IPCC science, and both ignored balancing advice from independent scientists; they also ignored the known risks of natural climate change. Relying in this way upon the IPCC to set Australian environmental policy is analogous to letting the World Bank set the Australian budget. Worthy though such UN organisations might be, at least in intention, they are unaccountable to Australian voters and do not provide the type of disinterested analysis that science depends upon. As an influential 2005 UK House of Lords report commented about IPCC's preparation of its Summary for Policymakers:

> We can see no justification for this procedure. Indeed, it strikes us as opening the way for climate science and economics to be determined, at least in part, by political requirements rather than by the evidence. Sound science cannot emerge from an unsound process.

At the beginning of its White Paper, issued on 15 December 2008, the government indicated that its present climate strategy is "built on three pillars: reducing Australia's carbon pollution; adapting to unavoidable climate change; and helping to shape a global solution".

This is not a good start, a lack of "sound science" being immediately apparent. For there is no such thing as "carbon pollution", nor for that matter "carbon dioxide pollution", which is presumably the intended meaning. Rather, by acting as a fertiliser for plant growth, atmospheric carbon dioxide is the basis for nearly the entire planetary food chain; its mild warming effect is also environmentally beneficial. Carbon dioxide, then, is most definitely not a pollutant. Second, because of the logarithmically decreasing warming that accompanies increasing carbon dioxide, reducing the rate of increase is likely to have little if any discernible effect on future global temperature or climate. Third, for there to be a global solution there first has to be an agreed global problem, which the White Paper indicates to be dangerous global warming. Yet again, this supposition flies in the face of scientific reality, for global temperature is currently cooling, and is predicted by many scientists to continue to do so.

Much more could be written on the defects of the White Paper, but it should already be clear that the scientific suppositions upon which the government's intended emissions trading system is based are irredeemably flawed. The reason is the equal flaws in the policy advice of the IPCC on which the government has so heavily relied.

The criticisms made above relate to the first and third pillars of stated government policy. The second pillar of policy is stated to be "*to adapt to unavoidable climate change*", something that I favour in its own right and which is further discussed later in this article. But adaptation is given lip service only in the White Paper which, instead, concerns itself mainly with the details of imposition of the intended carbon dioxide tax system. As the paper rightly says: "*Work on adaptation in Australia is in its infancy, and it is only in the last year that collaborative action has commenced to develop and implement a comprehensive national adaptation strategy*". A small foundation stone, perhaps, rather than a policy pillar.

But why not mitigation just as a precaution?

Supporters of the Australian government's emissions trading measures are adamant that human-caused global warming is such an extreme hazard that urgent measures are needed to prevent it. Misleadingly termed mitigation, the preferred "solution" is a carbon dioxide taxation scheme, to which has been allocated the truly Orwellian name of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

Dangerous human-caused climate change may be, indeed is, a fervent belief for many environmental NGOs and the scientists who support their aims. But in addition to the lack of evidence

to support this belief in the first place, the emissions trading schemes that are proposed as solutions have their own compelling disadvantages.

First, they are expensive, and — given that no deleterious human effect on global climate has yet been identified and that global temperatures are cooling — most likely pointless.

Second, there is the additional large opportunity cost of squandering money on a non-solution to a non-problem; as Bjorn Lomborg points out, many much higher priority demands exist, such as finding the $40 billion annually that the UN estimates would deliver clean drinking, sanitation, basic education and healthcare to all who need it, worldwide.

Third, the experience of "early mover" countries, such as Norway, which introduced a carbon dioxide tax in 1991, is that at feasible levels like $15-30/tonne-CO2 this instrument is an ineffectual policy tool, Norway's emissions having increased by 15 per cent. Coupled to this is the notorious instability of trading markets, as exemplified by the near collapse of the EU emissions system just after its introduction in 2005 (because too many free permits were issued), and its current rapid fall from euro-31 to euro-8/tonne (because the deepening recession is reducing energy demand, providing industrialists with an abundant supply of free permits to sell).

Fourth, theoretical studies suggest that even were Australia to curtail its emissions altogether, the possible consequential contribution to global cooling, or brief deferral of global warming, would be less than 1/1000 of a degree. In practice, such a miniscule change cannot be measured meaningfully, and anyway such putative local cooling might be completely counteracted by other local natural climate feedbacks.

Finally, fifth and by no means least, an ETS is regressive, and its imposed costs will fall most heavily on already disadvantaged members of the Australian community.

Notwithstanding these strong arguments against attempting to mitigate hypothetical warming, and however small the probability may be of human-induced warming, prudence requires that a mechanism be identified that can deal with the human effect should it emerge, as discussed further below.

A proper national climate strategy: adaptation to natural change

The main thing that is known about climate change is that it will continue. Natural coolings, warmings, abrupt changes and severe weather events are all certain to occur in future. The issue is therefore one of risk appraisal, given that these events will from time to time wreak human and environmental damage. No known policy option can mitigate all these different processes, and adaptation is therefore the only feasible option.

In our present state of scientific knowledge, most major climate events or changes are unpredictable and unpreventable. It is therefore the case that

all countries, including Australia, need to develop adaptive climate strategies that are suited to their own particular local climate hazards (i.e., one IPCC size will not fit all). The government's planned carbon dioxide taxation legislation represents an ineffectual attempt to address speculative global warming only. It is neither an adequate national climate policy on its own, nor even a desirable part of one.

The existence of unpredictable natural hazards is the prime reason that civil defence agencies exist. Our near neighbour, New Zealand, has established a world best-practice civil defence agency, called GeoNet, to deal with natural environmental hazards. GeoNet provides other authorities and the public with accurate, evidence-based information about hazards like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and floods. Though longer-term climate change has so far not been included in GeoNet planning, it differs from the hazards that are covered only in the extended decadal timescales over which a deleterious trend might occur. GeoNet already deals with short-term weather events such as storms and floods, and the risks of longer-term climatic changes could be easily and cost-effectively managed by such a national hazard agency. Appropriately, GeoNet is linked to a parallel public compensation agency called the Earthquake Commission.

In Australia, natural hazards are dealt with by a complex mix of federal and state government and volunteer groups. One organisation that deals with hazard planning at a national level is Emergency Management Australia, administered through the federal Attorney-General's Department and located at Mount Macedon, Victoria; EMA, however, is a training rather than an implementation agency. Though not unhealthy of necessity, the complex overlapping of hazard responsibilities that occurs in Australia leads to organisational turf wars and overlaps or gaps in emergency response to particular disasters; it also tends to be financially inefficient.

HazNet: An effective, prudent and precautionary climate change policy

It is long past time to move away from stale "he-says she-says" arguments about whether human carbon dioxide emissions are causing dangerous warming, and on to designing a politically feasible middle-ground climate policy that deals with the real problem. For the key issue on which all scientists agree is that natural climate change exacts very real human and environmental costs. Reporters and broadcasters provide us with examples from around the world almost daily in their news coverage.

Study of the ancient climate record indicates that natural change involves risks from both warmings and coolings, and reveals many instances of change of a speed and magnitude that would be hazardous to human life and economic well being should they be revisited upon today's planet. At the same time, human history records many examples of damaging short-term climatic hazards such as storms, floods and droughts. Most

such events, whether they are abrupt or manifest themselves as longer-term trends, remain unpredictable — even when viewed in hindsight.

Climate change as a natural hazard is therefore as much a geological as it is a meteorological issue. Thus it needs to be managed in the same way as other geohazards, i.e., by monitoring for the onset of dangerous events and having a civil defence response plan to deal with events that eventuate. Those responsible for planning national climate policies must abandon the IPCC's unjustifiably alarmist virtual realities of human-forced climate change, and the illusory goal of "preventing global warming". Instead, plans are needed to identify when an actual, real-world, dangerous weather or climate event is imminent, and then to mitigate and adapt to that event as it develops.

Because it would deal with climate reality as it unfolds, a national disaster response agency whose mission encompasses all major environmental hazards represents a prudent and cost-effective middle-ground solution to the global warming issue. Even were generous funding to be provided for implementation of such a national natural hazard warning and disaster relief scheme — let us call it HazNet — the overall costs would be orders of magnitude less than those caused by an unnecessary and ineffectual carbon dioxide tax. To boot, contingent damage to the economy, the standard of living and the world food supply would be avoided.

No country needs a HazNet more than Australia. Our national well-being, including an important part of the economy, depends upon the sensible, sustainable production of food and materials from an agricultural sector that is heavily influenced by climatic events. And our metropolises, too, are all periodically susceptible to savage climate vagaries. Eastern Australian climate, with its alternations of flood and drought, is known to have strong links with the El Niño-La Niña cycle, whereas southern and south-western Australia are more influenced by events and changes that originate in the Indian or Southern Oceans. It is these, and related, climatic matters that Australian research and financial resources should be used to understand and alleviate, rather than legendary global warming. Most importantly, a society that has prepared properly to cope with the changes that Nature herself imposes is, by that very fact, prepared for any human-caused change that might occur as well.

Summary

The global warming issue has become very big business indeed for bureaucrats, politicians and business, as well as for scientists and environmental NGOs. Thus it has been estimated that Western countries alone are currently spending at least $5 billion annually on global warming-related research or policy formulation. This buys a lot of science and influences a lot of adherents. Perhaps even more unbelievably, Doug L. Hoffman and Allen Simmons, in their study *The Resilient Earth: Science, Global Warming, and the Future of Humanity* (Char-

leston, South Carolina: BookSurge Publishing, 2008), estimate that the United Nations alone currently funds 60,000 projects that deal with (human-caused) climate change.

All of this activity, and much more besides, is predicated upon the supposition that human carbon dioxide emissions are causing dangerous global warming. Instead, the hard reality is that after 20 years of intensive research effort, and great expenditure, no convincing empirical evidence exists that the human effect on climate (which is undeniable locally) adds up to a measurable global signal. Rather, it seems that the human global signal is small and lies submerged deeply within the noise and variability of the natural climate system.

The IPCC's **Plan A**, therefore, is a dead parrot. For "greenhouse gas reduction", by any means, becomes an irrelevancy when it can only deal with as-yet-unmeasured, human-caused global warming, and that at a time when the globe has been cooling for 10 years. But just as the "science" that is cited in favour of dangerous human warming caused by carbon dioxide emissions shows all the hallmarks of orchestrated propaganda, so too the real science shows beyond doubt that the wide array of extreme natural events — which include climatic warming trends, cooling trends, step-events, heat waves, droughts, cyclones, floods and snowstorms — poses great dangers for humanity.

Australia now needs a **Plan B**, which is the introduction of adaptive policies to deal with natural climate change and to replace the government's current expensive, inefficient and ineffectual plans to "prevent human-caused global warming". The failure of both Mr Rudd and Mr Turnbull to respond to this need by confronting ecosalvationist hysteria about imaginary global warming, and at the same time dealing sensibly with the real threat of natural climate change, now bids fair to undermine their leadership positions.

A national climate policy that improves our ability to recognise, manage and adapt to natural climate change and events, as could be met by the creation of a **HazNet** organisation, is an urgent necessity, and would cost but a fraction of the mooted emissions trading scheme — a non-solution to a non-problem if ever there was one. And, by their very nature, strategies that can cope with the dangers and vagaries of natural climate change will readily cope with human-caused change, should it ever manifest itself. Why is it so difficult for Australia's major political parties to discern this obvious truth?

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