

9 September 2008

## **Letter from Professor Ross Garnaut to scientists and environmental groups**

I have noted comments from some members of the scientific community and environmental groups on the recent *Targets and Trajectories* Supplementary Draft Report delivered by my Review on 5 September 2008.

In *Targets and Trajectories*, I said that Australia should announce now that it was prepared to do its proportionate share in the context of an effective international agreement to reach 450ppm concentrations of carbon dioxide equivalent. Australia in this context would commit itself to a reduction of net emissions by 25 per cent over 2000 levels by 2020 (40 per cent per capita) and 90 per cent by 2050 (about 95 per cent per capita). The 2020 target would amount to an absolute reduction of about 35 per cent over 2012 levels.

I also expressed the view, however, that it was unlikely that an agreement with corresponding commitments for other countries would be achieved at negotiations at Copenhagen and immediately afterwards. Australia, while announcing its commitment to the 450 goal and to its own contribution to it, should therefore set its sights on a realistic international goal of 550ppm over the next couple of years.

In my view, success in early progress towards 550ppm would create new conditions, not evident now, in which an effective international agreement towards 450ppm might become possible. Australia should be prepared to commit now to doing its proportionate share in 550ppm, which would involve cuts of 10 per cent by 2020 (30 per cent per capita) and 80 per cent by 2050 (about 90 per cent per capita). The 2020 target would amount to an absolute reduction of about 20 per cent over 2012 levels.

I note your views that I have been too pessimistic, and that an effective agreement around 450ppm is possible at Copenhagen at the end of 2009. I hope it is obvious from the various publications of the Review that I would be delighted if there were a sound basis for this alternative judgement, but I fear there is not.

An important way of looking at 2020 commitments is how much countries will have to reduce emissions relative to 2012, since that is the earliest period from which a new global agreement might be expected to apply. As shown in *Targets and Trajectories*, a 450 target would require the developed countries on average to reduce net emissions between 2012 and 2020 by 34 per cent, or around 5 per cent a year.

The 550 target requires an annual reduction over the same period of about 2.5 per cent a year. Even this lesser reduction rate is a major challenge when considered against continued increases in emissions to date, and will require significant structural change, as I noted in my speech to the National Press Club.

With regret, I note that no developed country or group of countries has indicated a willingness to cut emissions by 2020 to the extent implied by the 450ppm target. The European Union comes closest but even its 30 per cent conditional offer (relative to 1990) falls short of the 36 per cent that would be required of it under the 450 agreement (Table 5.4 of the Draft Report).

Canada's target is instructive: its current 2020 commitment would translate, we estimate, to a reduction of 10 per cent over 2000 levels, less than would be required of it in a 550 let alone a 450 world.

In another example, the US Presidential candidate commitments for 2050, if translated into 2020 targets with a starting point of 2012 convert into reduction commitments of around 10-15 per cent over 2000, again consistent with a 550 rather than a 450 agreement. (Similar targets are given or implied by various US climate change bills.)

Of course, smaller reductions could be asked of developed countries were the developing world prepared to commit to more, but we have already assumed that the developing world will reduce emissions around 10 per cent below business as usual levels by 2020, which itself would be a significant achievement.

My judgement is that the contribution required of developing countries up to 2020 to achieve the 550ppm path would exhaust what might optimistically be expected of them, and that the additional reductions to achieve 450ppm would have to come from the developed countries.

Beyond 2020, further very demanding emissions reductions would have to come from developing countries. Table 5.2 of my report also shows that the 450 goal would require a 13 per cent reduction in emissions by developing countries in 2050 relative to 2001.

It is important to note that the 450 goal, which we each support, is a goal which can only be achieved by overshooting above 450ppm for some time. The debate therefore is really about what length and magnitude of overshooting is feasible and tolerable. Unless we get started now on a feasible way forward, we may never be able to move towards an emissions trajectory which will return the world to atmospheric concentrations of 450ppm or below.

I expect that you will agree with me that we would serve no good purpose, and waste valuable time, if each country said it supported 450ppm, but was not in fact prepared to accept an emissions constraint which, when put alongside the commitments of others, did not add up to 450ppm.

If there were credible evidence that there are reasonable prospects of an effective agreement around 450ppm coming out of Copenhagen, I would be delighted to reflect this reality in my Final Report. Any input you could provide prior to the release of my Final Report on 30 September would be welcome.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Ross Garnaut