

Des Moore <<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/stories/s2118336.htm>>

Thinking about the debate over whether the United Nations Bali conference should agree targets to reduce (mostly) carbon dioxide emissions reminds me of the famous musical South Pacific. There the French plantation owner falls in love with the American navy nurse and sings of seizing the moment so that it won't slip away. In one verse he asks "Who can explain it? Who can tell you why? Fools give you reasons? Wise men never try".

Of course, it all ends happily on the staged Bali Ha'i. But the staged environment conference may not end so happily for the love stricken believers trying to seduce countries to succumb to targets. Many countries are reluctant to commit, especially to early targets, and increasing numbers of scientists question the idea of any targets at all.

Several developed countries at Bali, including Australia, specifically refuse to commit to binding targets for 2020 even on a group basis and developing countries' attitudes suggest they won't tie themselves to any target. Relevant is Prime Minister Rudd's election direction to then spokesman Peter Garrett to state that Australia's "essential prerequisite" would be for developing countries to make appropriate commitments. But so far he has given no definitive indication of what they might be.

Yet it seems essential that Australia's international competitive position be protected by ensuring that any substantive reduction in our emissions is accompanied by similar commitments from very major emitters like the Chinese and Indians. The talked-about two year time frame for negotiating on such matters will be too short to achieve this.

Rudd has also indicated an Australian commitment additional to the already-promised 60 percent emissions reduction by 2050 will have to wait until the report commissioned by mid year from Professor Garnaut. On 29 November the latter indicated his report would cover a range of issues, including potential impacts on Australia and possible mitigation actions.

As a high consumer (and exporter) of fossil fuels, it is vital for Australia to first carefully consider the possible consequences, particularly economic, of any policy involving large, early reductions in emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>. True, some economists claim that even the cost of adjusting to large curbs on emissions would be small. But the extent of potential adverse effects on living standards is widely disputed given the prospective major change from using economically efficient to economically inefficient means of production and distribution.

Careful consideration is also needed to the extensive potential for normal functioning markets to adapt without government enforced emission targets. Existing wide differences in average temperatures, with Finland's average of only 5 degrees and Singapore's extending to 29 degrees, indicates how well individuals can adapt to different climates. In any event, higher temperatures would improve living conditions: net death rates caused by cold conditions would fall.

Finally, scientific claims made in IPCC reports need thorough examination. A considerable body of expert scientific opinion rejects the theory that increases in human-produced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are the principal cause of higher

temperatures now compared with a century ago.

High temperatures have occurred in the past when CO2 emissions were tiny and falls in temperatures have occurred even when large emissions happened. Many past doomsday-type predictions by scientists have been proved wrong. It would be irresponsible for an Australian government to simply accept an international report based on the current scientist club.

There is particular doubt about the basic scientific thesis that the increase in carbon dioxide saturation in the atmosphere resulting from increased emissions will cause commensurately higher increases in temperatures. Equations published in IPCC assessments (but not taken into account in IPCC recommendations) show that nearly 70 percent of the greenhouse effect of CO2 occurred from the first 50 parts per million (ppm) of CO2 concentration. As that concentration is now nearly 400 ppm, further increases can have only very limited temperature-increasing greenhouse effects. Even a doubling to 800 ppm would add less than 10 percent to the component of the greenhouse effect attributable to carbon dioxide.

Other important aspects of IPCC reports are open to serious questioning on scientific grounds. In short, no major decision about limiting emissions, either directly or indirectly, should be made by the Australian government without much more scientific investigation. Garnaut's statements indicate he simply accepts the alleged scientific consensus: a separate report involving qualified scientists is needed.

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\* Maree :

14 Dec 2007 12:48:53pm

This is redolent of Nero I'm afraid - I think the science is pretty clear that the increase in CO2 is causing global warming - there may be an argument to be made that human activity may not be responsible but in the absence of significant volcanic activity it's hard to imagine what else it might be. In any event, not taking steps now to reduce the output of carbon (and the loss of rainforest) would be irresponsible to say the least.

In the past, subsequent generations have been bequeathed awful problems to deal with because of ignorance - we don't have that excuse. This generation must act for the benefit of those to come after us. It will be painful, but the human race has the ability to be innovative and adaptive - that's why we're at this point in history. I urge all governments to set to work on managing the impact of climate change and mitigating greenhouse gas output.

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