**Climate Change**

It’s the issue that won’t go way despite the efforts of deniers, those ostriches among us, and in the government, who bury their heads in the sand, ignoring the fact the sand is hotter than it was last time they pretended climate change wasn’t an issue.

The Morrison government, dominated by climate change skeptics, declares itself in the fight with a ‘technology, not taxes policy.’ Snake oil. That’s what I call such statements. This one’s just another cute slogan, but one which is left open to the obvious accusation that it is misleading, unfunded lip service. Taxes pay for technology. Surely it makes sense to tax carbon emissions and use the proceeds to invest in renewable technologies.

However, what makes sense and what actually happens are often do very different things.

The history of political responses to climate change in Australia since the 1990s reveals a bit of a non-party specific Jekyll and Hyde approach. A definite lack of consistency is evident. In 1997, the Liberal government insisted adapting emissions reduction targets would have a devastating impact on the economy, so they shied away from doing anything.

However, in 2020, Scott Morrison’s government decided to keep the targets set by a previous Labor Government. Now, the government appears to want to stick to low targets while the rest of the world’s modern economies are pressing forward with stricter, more definite reductions targets. The world is getting serious. Why aren’t we?

Climate change policy is a hot issue, but instead of wrestling towards unity on definitive action, the issue has become a hot potato. Australians feel cheated by this lack of direction and leadership on climate change and rightly so.

Let me talk about the situation now. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has just released its sixth assessment report. I’ll quote directly from the policy maker summary statement.

“It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. Widespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere have occurred.”

Unequivocal. The evidence cannot be refuted. Here’s another quote.

“Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened since the Fifth Assessment Report (AR5).”

Evidence has strengthened. The more research that is conducted, the stronger the case becomes.

“Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO2) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.”

Temperatures will rise unless action is taken.

The report also mentions specific climate events such as marine heatwaves, ecological droughts, increasingly intense tropical cyclones, reduced permafrost less effective carbon sinks, and notes irreversible, historical changes.

The IPCC is an authoritative body comprised of 234 scientists who produce irrefutable scientific evidence of global warming based on 14000 peer reviewed papers.

In Australia, we know it. We feel it. 1.5 degree higher average temperatures than last century, catastrophic bushfires, coral bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef, and a 23% fall in agricultural profits are all directly attributable to climate change.

Dr Joelle Gergis of the Australian National University joins the chorus of scientists saying this latest report is a wake-up call for the world. She warns, “If this report, and the evidence from around the world right now, does not convince this generation of political leaders that we have to stabilise the climate then I don’t think anything else will. This is as clear as we can be. Now it’s up to our political leaders to act.”

Most of us get it. Sadly, as with the willful ignorance of those conspiracy theory loving people who continue to resist sensible and necessary public health safety measures to combat COVID, we also have some people who don’t want to face the facts about climate change. Of greater concern, is that a number of these people are in government.

The Morrison government talks a lot about what is doing and what it has achieved regarding the battle against climate change. But it’s smoke and mirrors. When you scratch beneath the surface you see the truth. Energy analyst Hugh Saddler has stated that fossil fuel emissions in Australia actually increased between 2005 and 2020.

Opposition spokesman for Climate Change, Chris Bowen states the IPCC report provides smore evidence of government inaction while Greens leader, Adam Bandt goes further by calling it a ‘death sentence’ for Australia. He says that ‘Government denial is putting Australian lives at risk.’

In full agreement with the majority of Australians, I echo Chris Bowen’s sentiment that Australians deserve better than government spin. It’s time to deliver.

Who has the most to lose from current inaction? Future generations of Australians. Whenever I talk to young people about what’s troubling them most in a wider political context, most of them to tell that climate change is of major concern. They’re troubled by how the government seems not t b taking the issue seriously. A number of polls and research findings, back up my personal experience. Here’s a few examples.

A 2019 Lowy Institute report found that six in ten Australians believe global warming is ‘a serious and pressing problem’ about which ‘we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs’. A clear majority (76%) of young Australians aged 18-44 agree with this statement.

In 2020 the Red Cross surveyed 1477 Australians aged between 10 and 24 from all over the country and found that 80% of them were either concerned or very concerned about climate change. Listen to what this 19 year old respondent from Perth had to say.

“Listen to the Indigenous Australian communities. Listen to the scientists. Take on their advice. Be determined and driven to make each Australian live ecofriendly lives. Work towards introducing new legislation and use renewable energy to reduce the effects of climate change.”

Lastly, in April of this year the findings of a survey of 1018 young Australians were published in a wide-ranging report on Generation Z by research organization Millennial Future. 80% of 16-17 year olds surveyed said that did not believe that the climate change is being exaggerated, and there is an overwhelming concern about the issue.

The message is clear. Climate change is real and young people care. We should therefore care as well, if we don’t already. We should care about climate change but also about how worried our young people are about the future.

So, in light of the IPCC’s Sixth Assessment Report, what is to be done about climate change? This is what the report itself says.

“From a physical science perspective, limiting human-induced global warming to a specific level requires limiting cumulative CO2 emissions, reaching at least net zero CO2 emissions, along with strong reductions in other greenhouse gas emissions. Strong, rapid and sustained reductions in CH4 emissions would also limit the warming effect resulting from declining aerosol pollution and would improve air quality.”

Allow me to go over this with a highlighter.

What should we do about climate change? Limit human induced global warning to specific levels. Aim for net zero CO2 emissions. Reduce greenhouse emissions. Strong, rapid and sustained CH4 reductions.

Strong, rapid and sustained reductions.

It will take at least 20 years of consistent effort in these actions for us to see any discernible difference. There’s the rub. The unfortunate and disappointing trend in Australian politics over the past fifteen years or so, since the monumental economic reforms of the Hawke/Keating governments, has been short term policy making. At the risk of going over old ground, I’ll give you an example of how shortsightedness results in poor national outcomes. The NBN was scaled way back from its original Rudd government design and intention. The reason it was downsized was cost. The result of that cost cutting is that today, in the 21st century, we have a sub-standard broadband internet service. I know it. You know it. Everyone knows it. One list I saw ranked countries according to their internet speeds. Our near neighbour Singapore is on top with the fastest internet speeds in the world. Have a guess where we were? 61st.

Anyway, back to climate change and the terrible inertia of our current policy makers. Forgive the repetition, but I think it’s necessary. The IPCC says we need to limit human induced global warming to specific levels. Target and achieve net zero CO2 emissions and implement policies which will result in strong reductions in greenhouse emissions, strong, rapid and sustained reductions in CH4. Strong, rapid and sustained reductions.

What is the federal government doing? Weak, slow and intermittent action on climate change based on a lack of belief fostering a lack of political will.

Germany is a world leader in environmentally responsible economic management. They’ve actually locked in net zero carbon emissions for 2045. When I say locked in, I’m not talking about pretty speeches drowning in rhetoric, I’m saying that they’ve made this target legally binding. It’s been legislated. In its response this year to a legal challenge brought against climate laws introduced in December 2019 which according to complainants were not strong enough, the High Court of Germany said this about the 2019 laws: "The provisions irreversibly offload major emission reduction burdens onto periods after 2030."

The court also stated that the previous laws which had weak carbon emissions targets, violated the rights of young people. Young people. Remember them? The future. I said earlier that young people I speak to are most concerned about the environment.

So much money and energy has gone into the fight against COVID-19. Lives are being saved and the battle will be won. In five years time, the horror of this global pandemic will be a memory, but the greater more devastating prospect of disaster brought about by climate change will still be confronting us. If we don’t act now, it will be worse.

If you ignore that mold in your walls, or simply scrub away the surface stain, you aren’t fixing he problem. We simply aren’t doing enough to fix the problem. I call on the Coalition government to be swift and decisive on climate change action. Accept the science. Accept reality and take responsibility for leading Australia into a carbon emissions neutral future.

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