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CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY: A MORAL NOT A MONETARY ISSUE

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is calling for strong leadership and bi-partisan support to address climate change on the eve of World Environment Day.

“The current plight of humanity in facing climate change can no longer be a debate about economics. Financial costs and economic prosperity are only a part of the equation. There is the broader moral and ethical responsibility to maintain the environment on which society, human health, welfare and our economy fundamentally depends,” said Dr Peter Tait, PHAA Environmental Health Special Interest Group Spokesperson.

“On the eve of World Environment Day 2009, PHAA calls for government leadership to assert and protect our common interests. Climate change is not a matter for compromise between competing interests. It is a matter that requires the government to listen to the scientific evidence and make policy accordingly. It is also vital that those on the opposite side of politics support efforts to stem the tide of climate change for the common good.

“To achieve the levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) necessary to stop the temperature rising by over 2 degrees, emissions will need to fall globally by 50% per head by 2050. To play their part fairly, industrialised countries such as Australia need to contribute per capita emission reductions of 80% or better. That is not 80% of projected levels but 80% of 1990 emissions.

“To get the economy geared up to head in that direction, 2020 emission targets for Australia need to be unconditionally in the order of 20 to 25%. The lower the temperature increases the less disruption there will be to human society and health.

“The role of economics is to advise on how to change in a way that minimises social and financial costs. However Stern and Garnaut have both advised that delay increases financial costs to the economy. Delay will also worsen the direct and indirect consequences of climate change on the health and wellbeing of all of us in Australia.

“The government’s Carbon Pollution Reduction legislation needs to heed the science, take account of the moral responsibility, and set its targets accordingly. We need to start to act this year,” said Dr Tait.

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