

Crisis? What crisis?

Climate Change and Threats to Health

The stalling of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme in the Senate this week is a sign that neither major political party nor Senators Xenophon and Fielding fully understand the urgency with which global warming needs addressing.

“The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has drawn attention previously to the host of health threats that global warming presents, from worsening extreme weather related injury and death through heatwaves, through changes in infectious diseases patterns to the risks from environmental degradation, loss of agricultural productivity and the resultant threat to complex industrial urban society. The current outbreak of dengue fever in north Queensland, the recent heat wave and bush fires in Victoria and the flooding in north eastern Australia presage the future weather in Australia caused by climate change,” said Dr Peter Tait, spokesperson for PHAA’s Environmental Health Special Interest Group.

“Both Ross Garnaut and Sir Nicholas Stern have warned that the longer governments take to act, the greater economic costs they and society will incur. Scientists warn that the observed effects of climate change are proceeding much more rapidly than was modeled in the 2007 IPCC Fourth Report. With the rate of carbon pollution accelerating, the risk of catastrophic climate change dramatically rises including the risk of temperature increases in the range from two to six degrees.

“We can not afford to delay action in Australia any longer. The Carbon Pollution Reduction legislation has to be reworked so to deliver emission reduction targets in line with the urgency of limiting maximum atmospheric carbon to as close to 450ppm as possible. This is in the range of 20 to 30% of 1990 levels by 2020.

“These targets will also signal to the international community that Australia, as one of the developed nations whose prosperity is founded on greenhouse emissions, is prepared to take its fair share of the burden of cleaning up. This increases the probability of other nations taking on fair carbon pollution reduction burdens at the Copenhagen Conference later in the year.

“As Professor Garnaut has said, *the private interest, the ignorant, the myopic and the excessive* have captured the debate. It is time for our elected representatives to put our common interests in a long term habitable planet out in front.

“The PHAA is looking for strong, determined political leadership similar to that shown in response to the financial crisis,” said Dr Tait.

For further information/comment:

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