

So much is happening in the climate change area that it is difficult to keep up. But the following, NOT reported in Australian media as far as I know, seems of some importance.

France ditches carbon tax as social protests mount (Daily Telegraph, 31 March)

“France is facing its own 'spring of discontent' as strikes shut schools, courts, railways and metro services, and trade unions vowed mass protests across the country.

President Nicolas Sarkozy on Tuesday scrapped the country's proposed carbon tax and reshuffled his cabinet in populist tilt after suffering a crushing electoral defeat over the weekend, when his Gaulliste UMP party lost every region other than in its bastion of Alsace and the Indian Ocean island of Reunion.

The vote saw a resurrection of both the Socialist Party and the far-Right National Front, showing how the delayed effects of rising unemployment can change the political landscape long after recession has passed. The jobless rate has risen to 10.1pc, up from 8.7pc a year ago. A quarter of those aged under 25 are out of work.

The government said its energy tax was being postponed indefinitely in order not to "damage the competitiveness of French companies", fearing that it would be too risky for France to go it alone without the rest of the EU. Brussels has announced plans for an EU-wide tax, but the initiative already looks doomed.

Chantal Jouanno, the environment secretary, said she was "devastated that eco-scepticism had prevailed". France's leading green groups wrote a joint letter to Mr Sarkozy saying they were "scandalised" by his decision, accusing him of tearing up a pledge to put climate change at the centre of his presidency.

Medef, France's business lobby, said the demise of the carbon levy was a "relief". The tax would have been €17 a tonne compared to around €100 in Sweden, but business feared that this would creep up over time.”

Also of importance are the ambit claims being made by former ACTU Secretary, now Climate Change Minister, Combet. The following letter by Bill Kininmonth highlights one of the many incorrect statements that Climate Change Minister Combet is making. As Tom Quirk has shown in a Quadrant Online article, Combet has used advice by a green UK think-tank, Vivid Economics, to claim that China already has an implicit carbon price higher than Australia's (the implicit price is calculated by adding estimated reductions in emissions resulting from all measures taken to effect such reductions). Tom's article shows that, properly calculated, the opposite is the case.

Been there, done that (Letter published in The Australian, April 2-3)

Greg Combet claims that China's power generation is an example Australia should follow ("Let's bust the furphy of China's inaction on emissions", 1/4).

Closure of small inefficient power stations and their replacement with larger, greener more economically efficient units on coal fields took place in Australia many decades ago. Similar action has taken place across eastern Europe over the past 20 years. China and India are now doing the same.

The government has a responsibility to ensure Australia continues to meet its energy needs and has a choice. It can accept that coal is the energy source of the near future and make it environmentally safer. Or it can identify an alternative and introduce the necessary legal and economic framework to phase it in.

William Kininmonth

Kew, Vic