

Terry Dunleavy: Let's use cooling off period to check our facts

Tuesday May 06, 2008

By Terry Dunleavy

Three reports appearing within 48 hours of each other in three different countries suggest that not only does New Zealand need to stop for a cuppa to look more closely at the science of climate change, but that we now have the time to do it.

First, the report of the New Zealand Institute for Economic Research (NZIER) has made us all realise the enormous cost of the emissions trading scheme proposed by the Government, and the adverse effects on our economy over time. Now that we have a better handle on what it will cost us, we can do a more meaningful cost/benefit analysis.

Here are some numbers to help:

The rate of increase in atmospheric CO₂ has been about 1.5 parts per million (ppm) per year over the past 15 years. New Zealand produces about 0.2 per cent of the world's man-made production of CO₂. Even if NZ totally eliminated CO₂ emissions, the difference would be to reduce the annual rate of increase in the atmosphere by 0.2 per cent of 1.5ppm, equalling 0.003ppm which equals 3 parts per billion. This of course is a far lower amount than can even be detected.

Are we seriously going to shatter our economy, restrict ourselves to a fragile electricity system, cost every family in the land \$1000 to \$1500 per year in electricity expenses alone, seriously damage our agriculture industry, etc. by trying to reduce New Zealand's minuscule CO₂ contribution?

But it's worse than that. The Government's stated goal is to reduce our CO₂ emissions by 20 per cent . So if we were to succeed in this, and thereby reduce New Zealand's 3 parts per billion contribution to 20 per cent of this figure, the reduction in global CO₂ arising from our action would amount to 0.6 parts per billion per year.

And all the while the actual world increase is 1.5 parts CO₂ per million annually, which is 2500 times greater than the reduction in CO₂ emission which would cripple New Zealand.

Second is an article on the Canada Free Press website by climatologist Dr Timothy Ball that sheds some light on the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which is quoted frequently as being the authority on climate change. And as being the work of "2500 scientists".

Apart from reminding us of the reported statement of Sir John Houghton, first chair of IPCC - "Unless we announce disasters no one will listen - Dr Ball goes on:

"Consensus is neither a scientific fact nor important in science, but it is very important in politics. There are 2500 members in the IPCC divided between 600 in Working Group I (WGI), who examine the actual climate science, and 1900 in working Groups II and III (WG II and III), who study impacts, adaptation and vulnerability and mitigation of climate change respectively. Of the 600 in WGI, 308 were independent

reviewers, but only 32 reviewers commented on more than three chapters and only five reviewers commented on all 11 chapters of the report."

Dr Ball's complete article can be found at <http://www.climatescience.org.nz>).

Third is the report in the Daily Telegraph in Britain which began:

"Global warming will stop until at least 2015 because of natural variations in the climate, scientists have said. Researchers studying long-term changes in sea temperatures said they now expect a 'lull' for up to a decade while natural variations in climate cancel out the increases caused by man-made greenhouse gas emissions.

"The average temperature of the sea around Europe and North America is expected to cool slightly over the decade while the tropical Pacific remains unchanged.

"This would mean that the 0.3C global average temperature rise which has been predicted for the next decade by the IPCC may not happen, according to the paper published in the scientific journal Nature."

This is significant for two reasons:

- (a) It takes the heat off the urgency to act. We can now have a closer look at the science, just to make absolutely sure that CO₂ is the culprit it has been claimed to be.
- (b) It begs the question of why the computer models used by IPCC in its first four assessment reports didn't predict the current period of temperature stability which has lasted now for almost 10 years.

Recently, the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand announced their intention to work together on the introduction of an emissions trading regime.

Perhaps, now, instead, they should look at a joint royal commission for a review of what their state-funded functionaries have been telling them.

*** Terry Dunleavy, of Takapuna, is secretary of the New Zealand Climate Science Coalition, and executive vice-chairman of the International Climate Science Coalition.**