

The last thing we need now is more costly climate virtue signalling

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Desperate to attend the September 2020 Glasgow climate change summit with a positive program, the Coalition government continues to promote, at the expense of national living standards, elitist-appealing measures that force lower greenhouse gas emissions.

The new elixir is to boost investment in CO₂-free **hydrogen technologies** which, if not mystical, hardly require funding from Australian taxpayers. New support measures add to the \$1.5 billion annual funding of a bewildering acronymic gaggle of institutions (including CEFC, ARENA, CER and CSIRO) and at least \$2 billion in subsidies to wind and solar.

The Glasgow meeting is the third phase of climate change programs.

The first phase was established by the Kyoto Agreement in 1997, in which rich nations pledged to stabilise their emissions. Although only ratified 10 years later by the Rudd Government, the Howard Government followed costly policies that would see Australia meet its targets.

Howard's policies included replacing low-cost reliable coal with high-cost unreliable wind and solar. But more importantly, then-environment minister David Kemp collaborated with his state counterparts in Queensland and New South Wales to prevent land clearing. In reducing Australian greenhouse gas emissions by a fifth, this also entailed lower agricultural production and a reprehensible expropriation of landowners' rights.

In one notorious case, NSW state planning restrictions reduced the value of land owned by a Peter Spencer from \$9 to \$2 million. Mr Spencer's appeal was dismissed by a judge who suggested that he should have taken an offer by the state to buy his land for the value to which its regulations had reduced it. Barnaby Joyce estimated the aggregate cost of these regulations to the thousands of farmers affected was \$200 billion. Ironically, the family farm of **Angus Taylor**, the Minister now responsible for climate change policy, is troubled by those land clearing restraints.

The second phase of climate change programs was solemnised as the 2015 Paris Agreement under which developed countries agreed to reduce their emissions by at least 26 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030. Such virtue signalling has real effects in abetting the replacement of fossil fuels by wind and solar – British courts have even said it rules out Heathrow Airport’s expansion.

For Australia, the Rudd/Gillard Government turbocharged renewable energy policy, leaving us in the unfortunate position of being a world leader in high-cost wind and solar installations. Tony Abbott tried to slow this headlong rush to the precipice by repealing Gillard’s carbon tax and (largely forlorn) attempts to reduce new subsidised renewable installations. He was however cajoled by the wets of his party into adopting “Direct Action”. This was to replace \$20 billion-plus in taxes on greenhouse gases with less than \$3 billion to buy out the “biggest polluters” like Hazelwood Power Station, which actually closed in 2016, causing a doubling of wholesale prices and a permanent emergency. “Direct Action” also planned to galvanize the nation’s youth with a 15,000 strong tree-planting Young Pioneer corps.

The Abbott Government also subscribed to the UN’s Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), under which nations (except the largest emitters like China and India, since joined by the US) agreed to reduce their emissions. This action was intended to deflect, at little additional cost, a whirlwind of hostility from bureaucrats and activists succoured on the milk of a fabricated human-induced climate emergency.

But such measures reinforce the harmful policies already in place. Moreover, they nurture the alarmist agenda, illustrated by the ambit for the Glasgow meeting having been raised with the slogan, “net carbon neutrality by 2050”. The **Business Council** has speculated that this would cost Australia \$22 billion a year but still endorses it. Some of its members, like many politicians, deceive themselves into thinking that goals thirty years ahead are irrelevant. In fact, they become foundation stones for all current policies as well escalators of even more onerous provisions. Although international climate change treaties like Kyoto and Paris are

toothless in the strict diplomatic sense, they constitute powerful national-level policy pressures.

Not only does the Morrison Government view its subsidy push as an alternative to more punitive regulatory measures, it sees merit in promoting new gee-whiz technologies. It claims these will position Australia to become a world leader in future all-conquering know-how.

Unfortunately, Australian Governments have a lamentable record in carbon abatement investments. A subsidised windmill blade factory in Victoria flopped. Support failed to nurture concentrated solar power stored in molten **salt**, which was to power much of South Australia. We had Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) for which the ever-gullible Rudd funded six permanent bodies, gifting \$315 million to the agitprop Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute. Ten years on, there is no CCS operating plant, which would, in any event, double the cost of generating electricity.

Australia is dependent on coal and gas as exports and for domestic energy. Requiring further emission reductions would bring more closures of coal generators that are (in a nuclear demonised Australia) the only means of avoiding even higher energy costs and further deindustrialisation. Yet, climate change fiction dominates Australia's media, epitomised by it comprising six out of the latest ten news items of the left-wing Sydney Peace Foundation, which has awarded its "Peace Prize" to the architect of the Paris agreement, Christiana Figueres.

Perhaps the global coronavirus epidemic will change this prominence. But Australia has yet to find a mainstream politician with the Trumpian ability and political capital to declare that the climate catastrophe emperor has no clothes and will, if left unchecked, destroy the economy.

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