

This is the second of a series of articles concerning Global Warming and Climate Change. This second part explores the inertia at many levels of society and government to address the issue.

Why Global Warming Won't Be Addressed

By Andrew Durieux

Background

Scientists, and in particular the UN operated Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) group of scientists, have told us that there is almost certainly going to be a minimum global average temperature increase (Global Warming) of around two degrees, and that we must act to reduce our Green House Gas (GHG) Emissions to 80% less than the year 2000 levels or there is near certainty that the temperature will rise further and faster.

The problem (with near certainty) for humans with the increase of two degrees comes from three main areas:

- Global sea level rise of around one metre minimum by 2050;
- An increase in the number and severity of natural disasters such as storm events, droughts and floods; and
- An increase in other problems such as diseases and food shortages.

In Asia, the sea level increase of one metre would render 20 cities of more than 10 million people unliveable. That is 200 million people displaced within about 30 years.

Reductions in GHG emissions are very unlikely to occur in situations where a government or other group are waging wars and need supplies of cheap fuel for various activities.

If the temperature was to increase more than two degrees these three abovementioned items are likely to become worse. Therefore there is a clear and urgent need to decrease GHG Emissions by at least 80%.

Why is this not even being attempted?

George Bush recently released a policy statement for the US saying that their aim should be to stop the increase in GHG Emissions by 2025, and then after that to

start reducing GHG Emissions. Given that the US is (and has been for many years) the Number One source of worldwide GHG Emissions, this means that there will almost certainly be a greater than two degree temperature increase – and probably well before 2025.

The policy statement effectively says that the US will not even attempt to reduce GHG Emissions below today's levels for another 17 years and will in fact allow them to increase beyond today's levels for the next 17 years. China is on track to take over the Number One spot very soon as they bring online an average of one coal burning power station every week – and will remain so for many years to come.

Why is it that no-one seems to take this matter seriously? This paper attempts to discuss some of the reasons for the current delay in action. The key reasons include (but are not limited to, and in no particular order):

- Religion;
- existing regional conflicts;
- political and business practice;
- standard of living expectations;
- the time and allocation of the cost of taking action;

- philosophical differences about the solutions and actions; and
- uncertainty about the dangers.

Religion

“God will either save us, or he is doing this as part of his plan to punish us/them/you.”

This is evidenced by groups such as the large Baptist population in the southern US stating on 13 June 2007 that Global Warming is not real, and that it

has not been caused by humans, and any attempts to alleviate it will only affect the poor, and therefore the US Government (and by implication all governments) should do nothing.

Regional Conflict

“Sorry – too busy killing the bad guys to worry about that right now.”

Reductions in GHG emissions are very unlikely to occur in situations where a government or other group are waging wars and need supplies of cheap fuel for various activities. These activities will include manufacturing of weapons and other equipment (electricity or coal powered plants for the most part), transport (petrol or diesel in large and inefficient vehicles) and command and control activities (electricity and other materials needed). Further complications arise from the damage caused by conflicts:

- new houses and shelters need to be constructed;
- replacement equipment needs to be purchased or manufactured;
- transport of people and property is often required; and
- waste products are often left rotting or blocking other efficient activities.

Political Expediency and Terms of Office

“I won't be in government in 2050.”

Most governments in the world today are democratically elected, and operate for fixed terms. The imperative is therefore on short term results to immediate issues and re-election.

Long-term decision making of the type required to address Global Warming is therefore difficult or even impossible. Even where governments are not democratically elected, governors themselves are often over the age of 50. A typical response to questions about Global Warming is that I won't be alive when it happens so I don't need to worry or take any action.

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