



Senate Speech

Family First Leader, Senator Steve Fielding

13 August 2009

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme

Until recently I, like most Australians, simply accepted without question the notion that climate change was as a result of increased carbon dioxide emissions.

I believed the media when they told me repeatedly that human caused carbon dioxide emissions were to blame for the changing temperatures on this planet.

In fact, I listened to radical environmentalist groups when they protested about the damage we were causing to this earth and to our future generations.

I remember the enthusiasm surrounding former US Vice-President Al Gore's movie - *The Inconvenient Truth*.

In many ways it was the precursor to the obsession now with climate change.

Climate change stopped being a topic of conversation only for scientists and radical green groups and suddenly became an issue discussed around the kitchen table.

It was as if all of a sudden climate change hit centre stage and carbon dioxide was the main actor -carbon dioxide was the new villain which needed to be caught and punished.

But all throughout this time one thing was missing, and that was genuine debate—debate on whether the science behind climate change as a result of human activity was even correct.

The one question that needed to be properly explored was ignored. The crucial piece in the climate change puzzle was thrown to the side. Instead, scientific ambiguity was treated as if it were a fact.

I am not saying that no-one ever questioned whether climate change was caused by something other than carbon dioxide emissions, but there are many experts who have called for a proper debate on the issue because of serious questions in the science which climate change alarmists have relied on.

But until now the scientists who believe that carbon dioxide emissions are not the major driver of climate change have been labelled ‘sceptics’ and dismissed out of hand without real debate.

To question the science has meant public ridicule. To even question the science has carried a stigma and had you labelled as a sceptic. This is not a debate.

Scientists who question the science behind climate change have been maligned in the media as fear mongers and backwards. Their views have been treated with contempt.

Anyone who dares to so much as even question the issue of human induced climate change is shouted down and discredited.

Free and fair debate, the very thing which we as a democracy thrive on, has been stifled on the climate change issue.

I will be making a challenge to the media towards the end of my speech in the second reading debate.

I seek leave to have a chart incorporated into *Hansard*. Each senator already has a copy of this chart. It is the chart that shows carbon dioxide going up and global air temperatures staying relatively the same. Each senator has seen that chart. I have distributed one to each senator over the last couple of weeks.

So when someone told me recently that carbon dioxide emissions have skyrocketed since 1995 but that global temperatures have remained steady I was left dumbfounded.

How could I as a federal senator, vote for something that will carry such a high price for all Australians and have such significant consequences and not be able to answer such a simple question?

If carbon dioxide is a problem, why have global temperatures not been going up as predicted in recent years?

I went out and spoke to a cross-section of scientists and quickly began to understand that the science on this issue is by no means conclusive.

I even went on a self-funded trip to Washington to investigate further the science and facts behind climate change, and I listened to both sides of the debate.

I heard views which challenged the Rudd government's set of so-called 'facts'—views which could not be dismissed as mere conspiracy theories but which were derived using proper scientific analysis.

I went on a journey to discover the truth about climate change and it is a journey that other Australians have now also gone on, perhaps not in a physical sense but certainly in an intellectual sense. Take, for example, a letter I received recently from a constituent, Karyn, which states:

Thank you for standing up and asking questions of the government about climate science. You have convinced me to also investigate questions of climate science orthodoxy.

Over the past weekend these are some impressions that I garnered from searches and discussions. I have learnt that the standard of 'peer review' for climate science is poor if compared with 'peer review' for pharmaceutical/medical papers and genetic research papers.

In these fields the science is expected to be repeated and so original data is freely available, methodology is clearly stated and the results are openly and vigorously debated.

I also learnt that the IPCC reports would not pass a 'due diligence' test if they were a business proposal seeking investors. On that basis I will keep an open mind and refuse to be bullied by fear and ridicule.

Once again Senator, thank you. Your actions spurred me out of complacency, thank you. Let's hope the debate opens up and can be carried on in a respectful, enquiring way.

During my trip to the US I met not only with scientists who were questioning the science but also with climate change experts on the other side of the spectrum. This included members of President Obama's administration who are driving the US's climate change policies.

As an engineer, I have been trained to listen to both sides of the debate on the science in order to make an informed decision about climate change.

Any scientist worth their salt will tell you that in order to form a conclusive view about any topic you need to properly explore all available possibilities.

All of this is nothing more than basic due diligence. Most people who are going to buy a house will first do some simple checks to make sure that everything is okay. That is due diligence.

They will check to see that the gas and electricity are working, that the water is running and that everything in general is in order. That might include getting experts to come along to conduct an inspection or asking some simple questions.

How much more so, then, should we be engaging in a debate on the science of climate change when implementing an emissions trading scheme would cost the economy several billion dollars and hurt Australian families?

When I came back to Australia I had a meeting with the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Wong; the Chief Scientist; and Professor Will Steffen.

I put to them three questions about climate change.

These were questions that I believed needed to be answered in order to establish that climate change is a result of human-made carbon dioxide emissions.

They are three questions that every senator needs to be able to answer themselves. The questions were not designed to trick anyone.

They were three simple questions which went to the heart of the climate change debate.

The first question I asked was whether it is true that carbon dioxide increased by five per cent since 1998 whilst global temperature cooled over the same period and if so, how can human emissions be to blame for dangerous levels of warming?

Quite simply, scientists for climate change have been declaring that it is carbon dioxide emissions which are driving up global temperatures.

According to this logic, global temperatures should be increasing, not decreasing.

However, since 1995, temperatures have remained relatively steady while carbon dioxide emissions have been going up rapidly each year.

The minister and her team of scientists were unable to answer this question. They insisted on rephrasing my question and they gave me an answer that left me no more convinced than I was before I had started.

Their response was that I should not pay attention to the trend in global air temperature, which has not been going up in the past 14 years as predicted, but that I should be looking at the heat content of the climate system.

In particular, I should focus on the temperature of the ocean. All of a sudden, the temperature outside was no longer important; it was ocean temperature that I needed to be looking at.

Those same scientists, only several slides earlier in their presentation, had been harping on about the rise in air temperatures, and now they were telling me that this was no longer important.

The same scientists who had even provided me with graphs of the changes in air temperatures were telling me that their own material was not an appropriate indication of the science.

That is odd.

Most amazingly, those same scientists who were telling me that the answer to my question lay in the rising temperatures of the ocean had clearly not read their own IPCC report. If they had, they would have seen that one of the working reports accepted by the IPCC stated:

"Limitations in ocean sampling imply that decadal variability in global heat content, salinity and sea level changes can only be evaluated with moderate confidence."

It further stated:

There is low confidence in observations of trends in the meridional overturning circulation.

What this means in laypersons terms is that the measuring and modelling of ocean temperatures is unreliable.

Even Professor Steffen admitted that ‘we did not have good measures of ocean temperatures in the past’.

In effect, I was being asked to rely on data which the scientists themselves believed to be unreliable.

The second question I asked was whether it was the case that the rate and magnitude of warming between 1979 and 1998—the late 20th century phase of global warming—was not unusual in either rate or magnitude as compared with warmings that have occurred earlier in earth’s history.

Furthermore, if the warming was not unusual, why is it perceived to have been caused by human carbon dioxide emissions and, in any event, why is warming a problem if the earth has experienced similar warmings in the past?

What I was essentially told was that changes to the climate which had occurred in the distant past were not relevant to contemporary climate change.

Apparently, it was irrelevant that we had had dramatic changes to the climate in the past, such as the ice age. This time it was different.

According to Professor Steffen, past changes to the climate were triggered by natural events, such as changes from the sun and its level of solar irradiance.

However, for some strange reason, they refused to accept that any of these past factors could be the reason for climate change now.

The third question I asked was whether it was the case that all GCM computer models projected a steady increase in temperature for the period 1990-2008—

whereas, in fact, eight years of warming were followed by 10 years of stasis and cooling.

Furthermore, why is it assumed that long-term climate projections by the same models are suitable as a basis for public policy making?

On this question, I was assured by the scientists that the global climate models are getting better all the time and that even better models are in the pipeline.

So the minister and her scientists basically conceded that the climate models which had been used to formulate public policy on this issue, and that will cost billions, were in fact flawed.

So, after emerging from this meeting and having also received a written response to my three questions, the fundamental question is—am I totally convinced that climate change is a result of human carbon dioxide emissions?

I am not totally convinced. I am not sure how anyone can be convinced on the basis of the responses.

I am yet to receive conclusive evidence that climate change is occurring because of human activity. At this stage, there is far too much uncertainty over the science of the climate change issue.

However, despite my concerns about the science, Australia may be forced to adopt an emissions trading scheme irrespective of the actual science of climate change.

Why? Already an emissions trading scheme is up and running in Europe. The United States is still in its draft legislation stage and is still to finalise the details, and they will change.

Most importantly, it is likely that the US scheme will ultimately end up with a type of tax on imports from high-carbon markets. Outrageous as it seems, an import tax is coming back in the US.

A similar measure may also be introduced in Europe and other countries where emissions trading schemes are operating.

Why is America doing it? Because they know it will cost jobs.

This will mean that in order for Australia to remain competitive on the global scale, an emissions trading scheme may be unavoidable.

It is for this reason that I do not rule out voting for an emissions trading scheme of some kind. But I stress that we should wait until Copenhagen and that it is economically reckless to do so before that.

However, at this stage, it is merely speculation. The details of what is happening around the globe are still very unclear. Most importantly, the details will continue to remain unclear until at least December, after Copenhagen.

As a result, I cannot at this stage support the introduction of an emissions trading scheme in Australia.

An emissions trading scheme will have a dramatic effect on the Australian economy and on Australian households.

The Rudd government has tried to sugar-coat its effects by saying that it will create a brand new low-carbon economy.

However, they have carefully disguised the most important aspect of this scheme. They have refused to call it what it really is.

This emissions trading scheme is really a multibillion dollar tax on businesses and on Australian working families.

Do not be misled. This tax will need to be paid by someone, and it will be millions of ordinary Australians who will end up footing the bill.

It is a tax that will devastate industries across the entire economy and lead to thousands of hardworking Australians losing their jobs and being sent to the dole queue.

In the mining industry alone, it is projected that 23,000 fewer people will be employed in the sector by 2020 if an emissions trading scheme is introduced.

That is 23,000 people with families to care for, with mortgages to pay and with hopes and dreams to live for. It is not just a random number; it is one person plus one person plus one person—23,000 times.

In places such as Latrobe Valley, where thousands of people are employed in the coal fired electricity sector, communities will be shattered if an emissions

trading scheme is implemented. Four out of five power stations could be forced to close down if the scheme is put in place.

State governments too will face a massive hole in their budgets as a result of the scheme and will be \$5.5 billion worse off by 2020. That means less money for schools, less money for hospitals and less money for social services which so many Australians rely on.

Australian families will also be hard hit under the Rudd government's proposal. Electricity prices are forecast to soar, with households set to face a 20 per cent increase in their electricity bill.

Council rates will be affected and will go up under the current plan. The Rudd government's ETS has the potential to cripple our economy and send families with their backs already against the wall tipping over the edge.

It is therefore hard to comprehend the Greens saying that this scheme does not go far enough. Perhaps economic suicide has become a new vernacular of the Greens.

The Rudd government has already delayed the introduction of the scheme, and there is no plausible reason why this vote cannot be delayed until after Copenhagen.

Even the executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Yvo de Boer, said last week that it did not matter if Australia arrived in Copenhagen without a scheme in place.

Given this is the biggest decision since Federation, I challenge the television networks to give the science of climate change a fair hearing.

We have seen various debates over the years on our television sets on the big issues affecting this country. But to date I am yet to see the scientists on both sides of the debate thrash it out on TV.

It is an important issue for people to get their heads around. It is important to have that debate at the national level and to have the issue debated fairly and openly.

This challenge is not exclusive to television networks either. I challenge the print media to run full-page unedited spreads in every capital city covering both

sides of the debate from a science perspective on whether man-made carbon dioxide is the main driver behind climate change.

For far too long, those who have simply questioned the science have been shot down and dismissed in the media. Journalism is supposed to be about balance, but over the last few months this balance and fairness has been lost because the government's propaganda machine has gone into overdrive.

Fair and open debate is essential because this decision on the government's CPRS will significantly affect ordinary Australians.

As I have said, thousands of people will be made redundant by the Rudd government's CPRS, while electricity prices will skyrocket by more than 40 per cent, not to mention local councils passing the buck on to ratepayers as councils' costs rise.

I am happy to revisit the issue following the outcome of the Copenhagen conference.

But until that time I cannot support a multi-billion-dollar tax on our economy when the government cannot even provide me with sufficient evidence to suggest that we need to be reducing carbon dioxide emissions at all in the first place.