

2 April 2012

Policy response to the Victorian Government's recent carbon management decisions

The Victorian Division of Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (EIANZ) wishes to express the strongest concern regarding the Victorian Government's recent decisions to;

1. Rescind the 20% carbon emission reduction target, and
2. Expand coal extraction and exportation in the Latrobe Valley. and

On behalf of the Institute, we wish to state that we are opposed to these policy changes.

We consider these decisions to be economically and environmentally detrimental for the long term security of Victorians. It also represents a gross breach of the trust placed in the Government by the people of Victoria to govern in the public interest.

The issue

Over the last 15 years climate change has been established as a serious and imminent threat to the prosperity, well being and safety of all human beings, with human generated carbon emissions identified as the overwhelming primary cause of this phenomena. Despite fierce debate regarding these facts, the vast majority of credible scientific publications on the topic have confirmed this position again and again, with the most recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) showing that increases in the global temperature has in fact largely exceeded the IPCC's predictions (Steenhuysen, J 2009).

These are facts that the majority of international governments, including the present Victorian Government, have stated as accepting (Wooldridge, M 2010).

The IPCC has stated that a reduction of carbon emissions by 20-40% below 1990 levels is necessary for the mitigation of climate change to safe levels (IPCC 2007), and as such the Victorian Government's previous 20% reduction target below 2000 levels by 2020 was welcomed and previously supported by the incumbent Government. The EIANZ is therefore disturbed by the recent decision to rescind this target, without providing any alternative (reduced) target. Such a target, even if aspirational, is critical to driving the mitigation of carbon emissions in Victoria, and while the Federal carbon pricing mechanism will contribute to this, it is insufficient on its own given its limited scope and compensation package.

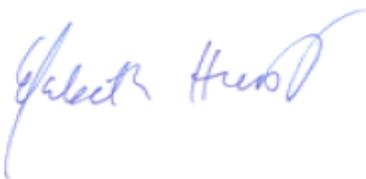
In addition to this, the fact that the burning of brown coal is clearly identified as a major source of carbon emissions in Victoria and internationally, means that the clear imperative for the Victorian Government is to phase out this fuel source in order to prevent catastrophic levels of climate change. While the EIANZ recognises that this phase out must be gradual in order to prevent unemployment and disadvantage, any expansion in mining or energy production would appear irresponsible in light of the contribution to climate change this would produce. Whether this coal is burned in Australia or overseas is irrelevant; the expansion of mining and exportation of Australian coal directly facilitates any emissions that may result.

Requested remedial actions

The EIANZ requests that the Victorian Government reconsiders its position and releases a comprehensive environmental sustainability strategy. This strategy should place both of these decisions in the broader context of the Victorian Government's approach to reducing carbon emissions below critical thresholds, whilst providing certainty for the Victorian people and the burgeoning green industry.

Regards,

Elizabeth Hurst



President
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References

1. Steenhuisen, J 2009, 'Global warming seen worse than predicted', Reuters, <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/02/14/us-climate-idUSTRE51D29E20090214?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews>>
2. IPCC, 2007, 'Summary for Policymakers', In 'Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change', M.L. Parry et al., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, pp.7-22.
3. Wooldridge, M 2010, 'Second reading of the Climate Change Bill to the Legislative Assembly', VicHansard, <<http://tex.parliament.vic.gov.au/bin/texhtmlt?form=jVicHansard.dumpall...>>