



CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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The Hon Tony Abbott
Prime Minister of Australia
Government House
Canberra

Dear Prime Minister

An appeal for action on climate change

The Clarence Environment Centre has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for over 23 years, and has a proud history of environmental advocacy. We have been particularly concerned about climate change, and the failure of successive governments to fully recognise the seriousness of the situation or to take appropriate action to avoid the more catastrophic consequences of continuing to emit greenhouse gasses through the burning of fossil fuels.

Last week's release of the IPCC's latest finding that there is a 95 % probability that the climate change that is occurring, is human induced, has to start alarm bells ringing. No longer can Australia claim to be doing its bit by reducing our own emissions by a paltry 5% below 2000 levels, while at the same time actively expanding the mining of coal, and supporting the exploration and extraction of highly polluting coal seam and other unconventional gas.

This latest report also touches on the issue of social unrest linked to a warming planet, confirming the findings of the 2009 report on the social impacts of climate change, compiled by the United Nations' Global Humanitarian Forum, which determined that:

"Climate change is already responsible for 300,000 deaths a year and is affecting 300m people", and "projects that increasingly severe heatwaves, floods, storms and forest fires will be responsible for as many as 500,000 deaths a year by 2030, making it the greatest humanitarian challenge the world faces".

It also found that: ***"Economic losses due to climate change (2009) amount to more than \$125bn a year — more than all the present world aid"***, predicting that: ***"By 2030 climate change could cost \$600bn a year"***.

Civil unrest may also increase because of weather-related events, the report says: ***"Four billion people are vulnerable now and 500m are now at extreme risk. Weather-related disasters ... bring hunger, disease, poverty and lost livelihoods. They pose a threat to social and political stability"***.

If emissions are not brought under control, within 25 years, the report states:

- ***"310m more people will suffer adverse health consequences related to temperature increases***
- ***20m more people will fall into poverty***
- ***75m extra people will be displaced by climate change"***.

In view of the overwhelming evidence, both scientific and physical, that climate change is occurring, and that humans are very likely responsible, we had hoped your well publicised “climate change is crap” comment was a purely rhetorical comment, made in the political “argy bargy” that has dominated politics during the last term of government.

We had also sincerely hoped that your government's pre-election 'opposition to action on climate change for the sake of opposing', would change once in office. However, your immediate actions to cut climate change initiatives, while at the same time issuing promises to facilitate the expansion of coal and gas mining, opening up of Tasmania's old-growth forests once again to logging, and a promise to subsidise the burning of native forests to generate electricity, has dashed those hopes.

Fact one – Global temperatures are rising, with almost everywhere experiencing record high temperatures in the last 2 years. Australia is currently experiencing its hottest start to spring on record, which follows the hottest winter, and hottest year. The ice melt across the globe is undisputed, as is the melting permafrost. Oceans are becoming more acidic, sea levels are rising, and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and more intense.

Fact two - Weather-related disasters are becoming commonplace which has seen the insurance industry forced to make huge upward adjustments to premiums, and map areas that are now in danger from storm surges, where insurance cover is unaffordable or completely unobtainable. Clearly that industry accepts the science of climate change.

Fact three - The costs of these weather related disasters are phenomenal, and if there is any need for a reality check, we need only look to the US where the top eight most expensive ever weather events, **adjusted for inflation**, have all occurred in the last 20 years, six in the last decade. Those six are: Hurricane Charley in Florida in 2004, cost a modest \$18.5 billion. Hurricanes Rita and Wilma, both in 2005, costing the US \$19 billion each. Hurricane Ike (2008), in Galveston costing \$29.2 billion; super-storm Sandy (2012) which cost \$65.7 billion, and topping the list, Hurricane Katrina (2005), by far the most damaging natural disaster ever recorded, costing an incredible \$148.8 billion. It decimated New Orleans, parts of which will never be rebuilt. The current Colorado flood disaster, described as being of “biblical proportions”, could well join this list.

Wild fires; droughts; floods and associated landslides; cyclones; tornadoes, and typhoons are now a universal problem, caused by only a one degree global temperature rise. This **was all predicted forty years ago**. Imagine the impacts of the 5 degree warming predicted by the latest IPCC report.

Fact four - Renowned global institutions such as The International Energy Agency, the World Bank, the IPCC, NASSA, and locally our own CSIRO, have all warned that we have to take decisive action to reduce emissions within this decade to avoid catastrophic levels of climate change. However, apparently the official Australian Gov't stance is that climate change is a myth.

Fact five – Australia is among the world's highest per capita polluters. We are the world's largest exporter of coal, and soon to become the world's second largest exporter of natural gas, wiping our hands of any responsibility for the emissions once it leaves our shores.

Therefore we strongly urge the incoming government to do the right thing by our grandchildren and future generations, and take the climate change threat seriously.

Yours sincerely

John Edwards
Honorary Secretary
Clarence Environment Centre.