

## When are we going to wake up?

by Walter Starck

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### **Six degrees and rising: I'll call your 2 degrees and raise it to 6**

The past few months has been a frustrating time for the climate change industry. Earlier in the year they were on a roll and it looked like a global treaty agreement at Copenhagen in December was a done deal. The heady scent of unprecedented power and money was palpable. Everyone on the bandwagon, activists, bureaucrats, researchers and entrepreneurs, were in high anticipation. But, as Copenhagen approached, unwelcome reality began to intrude on the dream. Real world costs and consequences began to make themselves heard. Developing nations served notice that they were not signing up to curb their progress and that they would need to receive lots of aid to reduce their increases in emissions. Conflicting science began to receive increased attention. A few brave politicians started to express doubts. Worst of all, global climate continued to not conform to predictions and public concern declined significantly.

Then, at last week's APEC meeting the leaders made a pre-emptive announcement that there would be no treaty at Copenhagen. The aim would instead be a "politically binding" commitment to further negotiations. Politically binding in this case can be understood to mean as it is in campaign promises. Right at the very threshold of climate control climax, Gaia, the bewitching mistress of climate power began to slip from the fond embrace of her besotted devotees.

Their frustration is understandable. It was perhaps most effectively expressed by Prime Minister Rudd in a remarkable nationally broadcast denouncement of climate change "deniers" at the Lowy Institute on 6 November. His presentation has been variously described as a tantrum, a dummy spit and a hissy fit. While such characterisation may perhaps exaggerate a wee bit, it was exceptional enough, coming from a national leader, to attract worldwide media attention.

This has been followed by a media barrage of increasingly dire claims of climate disaster from the research community. With no new information and no warming either, the predictions of climate disaster have escalated dramatically. Each report seems to strive to outbid all previous ones in terms of catastrophe. Although, as a psycho-social phenomenon this is admittedly fascinating, as a debasement of the fundamental principles and ethics of science it is also quite sad. Even worse, it poses a serious worry regarding our capacity to effectively recognise and address the much more certain and imminent problems we seem likely to face.

In just the past couple of weeks widespread media attention has been given to researchers claiming that accelerated sea level change threatens hundreds of thousands of coastal homes with inundation, the Great Barrier Reef will be wiped out by a 2° rise in sea surface temperatures and then came this week's shocker high bid. The previously widely touted (and purportedly 90% certain) 2° warming by the end of the century was suddenly raised to 6°.

None of this stuff is based on any measurable change in world climate trends. Both temperature and sea level rises have, in fact, decreased over the past few years. The average global temperature is within a fraction of a degree of where it was a century ago. The rate of sea level rise is around 1.7 mm per year, which is also very close to what it was a century ago. A 2° rise in Barrier Reef water temperatures would bring them up to about the same as in the Coral Triangle area which straddles the equator to our north and is where corals flourish at their highest level of diversity anywhere on the planet.

All of these prophecies are supposedly based on projections from models; but, output from models are not real world data. They are simply estimates reflecting the opinions of the modellers. This is especially so with the kind of complex interactive models used in climate studies. These are not based on rigid verified formulas and precisely quantified input variables. They can take any form, as simple or as complex as the modeller chooses, and many inputs are only uncertain estimates. Such models typically require a great deal of tedious adjustment in order to produce outcomes which are both plausible and acceptable to the modellers. Within the limits of plausibility and uncertainty, such adjustments can result in a very broad range of outcomes. Those presented to the public are simply what the modellers deem to be appropriate ones. They represent an opinion or educated guess by the modellers, nothing more. That most modelled outcomes are similar is unsurprising. Outcomes that are too different from most others will be criticised and have to be defended. All of them embody numerous uncertainties and cannot be strongly justified. Amidst such uncertainty and vulnerability most modellers choose to not stray too far from the middle of the herd.

The jump from a 2° to 6° increase in global temperature involves two components. One is an adjustment for an exponential increase in greenhouse gas emissions over the remainder of the century based on extrapolation from the recent growth in emissions by developing nations over the few years just before the current recession began. The other important aspect is that the study proposing the 6° rise has 31 authors from all over the world. This was a coordinated move by the herd so no one would be out there on their own trying to defend the indefensible. As for the validity of the move itself, the only reasonably certain thing about economic projections is that no trend ever continues for very long and exponential growth is inherently limited.

Over the past few decades environmentalism has become a social phenomenon which cannot politically be ignored. While various real environmental problems have been recognised and addressed, the inherent uncertainties and complexities in such issues combined with their strong emotional appeal also readily lends itself to delusions as well as co-option for quite different agendas. Anthropogenic climate change has established itself as the mother of all environmental problems and has become a veritable cornucopia for everyone on the climate bandwagon. Only a few weeks ago unimaginable power and profits seemed tantalisingly close.

In environmental concerns there are three key elements which interact to create a powerful synergy.

One is the shrinking portion of the population engaged in production as a result of technological advance and a growing population of predominantly urban non-producers. Although their own choice of habitat in the tiny fraction of the nation where nature has been virtually annihilated, many subscribe to a romanticised quasi-religious notion of a pure, perfect, delicately balanced natural world. They express strong opinions and great concern

over remote things of which they have little or no actual knowledge or experience. They view nature as a sacred trust which is being defiled by greedy rapacious people who must be stopped. Their appreciation of the system of production which supports them begins at the shop and ends at the rubbish bin. Although totally surrounded by technology and utterly dependant on it, their technical capability is challenged by a dull knife or leaking tap. Nevertheless, their vote can determine government and politicians pander for it.

Another element is the propensity of government for an ongoing proliferation of regulation and bureaucracy constrained only by the limits of available revenue. The environmental area is both attractive to voters and a political cheap shot. It's popular and regulation doesn't usually require much up front cost to government to implement. The real cost in needlessly stifled productivity with little or no environmental benefit is not apparent. It's an electoral no brainer.

The third element is an academic/research system which produces volumes of certified experts in things about which little is actually known and most of what we think we know is wrong. Along with a fictitious expertise, the products of the degree mills are indoctrinated with a politically correct eco-salvationist ethos. However, there is rarely any formal training at all in the philosophy and ethics of science. Although their degree indicates they are Doctors of Philosophy, their training is that of a technician, not a philosopher. Their only prospect of employment is a position either funded or required by government. It may be noted that a position is not the same as a job. The latter requires some level of output, the former only involves occupancy of a space.

In addition, the atmosphere of academic research in the environmental area has come to be dominated by competitive bidding for government funding wherein the currency of the bids is the degree of purported threat. The more serious and urgent a threat, the more likely is funding approval. Research funded to investigate a problem never finds there really isn't one or that it's only trivial or temporary. Good news about the environment is unwelcome and suspect. If it can't be explained away, good news is simply shelved. Publication of such would be unlikely to get past peer review anyway and, if somehow it did, it would only subject the author to denigration. Too many right thinking colleagues would be sure from everything they understand about the world that it just couldn't be true.

At the same time we are obsessing over hypothetical solutions to imaginary problems and gradually strangling whole sectors of our primary production, there is total denial of a very real, obvious and imminent threat of far greater severity. Although it is staring us in the face, like the proverbial 800 lb. gorilla in the room, there seems a strange reluctance to even acknowledge it exists.

The imminent reality facing us is not the demise of the Great Barrier Reef, coastal inundation or catastrophic climate change, maybe, someday, if.... It is simply that a growing world demand for oil seems certain to begin to exceed supply sometime in the next few years, or perhaps even months if economic recovery continues to improve. With any shortage, supply goes to the highest bidder, large users seek to hedge against further increases by buying futures contracts and speculators jump in. The oil price spike in July 2008 precipitated the credit crisis and crashed the global economy within a few weeks. Another spike in oil price will install Global Recession 2.1 when backup and restore capacity is already exhausted from dealing with the current version. The problem will then be how to keep a complex high

energy economic engine running with half its cylinders misfiring and the other half not working at all.

Our real problem is going to be how to find enough fossil fuel to keep our economic system functioning over the decades necessary to develop viable alternatives. It is very unlikely to be how to make it expensive enough to discourage its use. Most critical of all will be how to produce enough food at a price people can afford in a depression. To make matters worse, our food producing capacity is increasingly being restricted and burdened by ill-conceived constraints imposed as a sop to the eco-delusions of urban greens. The accumulating morass of often moronic regulations has already driven many primary producers out of business and is a severe constraint on those who remain. In a recession this burden will become unviable for many more. For consumers this must inevitably mean shortages and higher prices. A recent OECD survey indicates that food prices over the past few years have increased more in Australia than any other developed nation.

Threats to the environment and the climate change “crisis” are hypothetical arguments presided over by people who have never built, grown, manufactured or produced anything and whose practical ability is challenged by changing a light bulb. They glibly speak of saving things or switching to renewable energy as if doing so is only a matter of installing a few regulatory control switches and flipping the entire world economy over to “sustainable” or “renewable” at little cost or inconvenience to anyone. Never mind the uncertainties, delays, failures, and cost blowouts which plague far less complex and uncertain projects. The faceless “they” who supply all our material needs will just have to make whatever changes are necessary. Where food comes from is not a problem parasites need to think about.

Known reserves of cheap abundant fossil energy are depleting at a growing rate. Discovery of new reserves is increasingly falling behind depletion and new finds are more and more ones which are increasingly costly to produce. Much new development has been cancelled or put on hold as a result of the recession. With oil in particular, existing production capacity barely meets current demand. Assured shortages are now in the pipeline whenever demand recovers.

Without some unimaginable breakthrough in technology, the era of cheap abundant energy is rapidly drawing to a close. Along with it will go the capacity to pander to the eco-fantasies of a large urban population of non-producers or even to support them. In an energy constrained world, those who can will (eat). Those who can't, won't. Ironically, the eco-fantasists may be granted their desire to enrich the biosphere by themselves being rendered into compost by policies they espoused and which made it impossible to continue to support them.

A few days ago hackers allegedly accessed the computer network at one of the world's foremost climate change research centres, the Hadley Centre in the U.K. Copies of extensive email correspondence between many of the most prominent researchers promoting the climate crisis were posted on the web and the mainstream media have now jumped onto the story. I needn't go into details here. Suffice it to say that along with the usual pettiness common to academia, the foul stench of scientific corruption has been released. This includes evidence of misleading selection and manipulation of data, the withholding and even destruction of data to prevent independent examination, as well as conspiracy to denigrate conflicting research and prevent its acceptance for publication.

In addition to the damning correspondence, a significant volume of scientific information was also released and is now being examined. Stand by for evidence of even greater

malfeasance to emerge. If nothing else, what has already been revealed makes it clear that, regardless of whatever may be the real nature of AGW, the scientific proof for it is highly uncertain and conflicted. It is also clear that many of its leading proponents have been knowingly complicit in an ongoing scientific fraud the likes of which has never before been perpetrated. At his next public apology session the PM should feel a duty to add frightened children, coastal property owners, farmers, graziers, fishermen and climate sceptics to his list of those wronged.

Australia is better situated than any other nation to cope with energy constraints but can only do so by a full and rational utilisation of our resources. We cannot do so with a severely restricted productive sector having to support a parasitic majority of bureaucrats and drones whose only contribution to society is complaint about and interfere with those who support them. All this is not someday, maybe, if. It is staring us in the face. When are we going to wake up?

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