



Doctors for the Environment Australia

Promoting health through care of the Environment

A branch of the International Society of Doctors
for the Environment

2 Reynolds Drive, Crafers
South Australia 5152

Tel: (08) 8339 3972

Fax: (08) 8339 4463

E-mail: mountlofty@ozemail.com.au
www.dea.org.au

National Emissions Trading Taskforce Secretariat
The Cabinet Office
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

submissions@emissionstrading.net.au

21st December 2006

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) Submission on the Discussion Paper, Possible Design for a National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme

Contact: Dr Graeme Horton

graeme.horton@newcastle.edu.au

Introduction

Doctors for the Environment Australia (DEA) is a not for profit organisation comprising medical practitioners who are concerned about the state of the environment and who believe that human health is threatened by human impacts on the environment.

DEA operates through education of our profession, governments and industry by using expert scientific and medical opinion. DEA is actively involved in educating the public about environmental health issues. Our committees include a number of medical scientists, including Professor Tony McMichael who sits on international bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The Consequences of Climate Change to Human Health

Climate change is known to be a grave threat to human health for the following reasons:

Extreme Weather Events

It is predicted that there will be more deaths, illness and injuries due to severe weather events in the coming years. In particular, The World Meteorological Organization estimates that the number of heat-related deaths could double in less than 20 years. (Bhattacharya, 2003)

Greater risk of infections carried by food and water

Warmer temperatures and increased variability of rainfall will mean that food poisoning and gastroenteritis due to infections carried by food and water will become more common and more severe.

Changing rainfall patterns and reduction in water supply

Reliable access to clean water is vital for our health and for food production. Climate change may bring longer and more frequent droughts to areas including southern Australia, increasing the strain on water resources and stress on communities.

Some harmful diseases carried by mosquitoes could survive in more areas

At present, mosquito-borne diseases such as dengue fever and malaria can survive in very few areas of Australia. The expected climate changes would make new regions susceptible to diseases – placing many more people at risk. If we do nothing about climate change, by the end of this century the dengue virus may be able to be spread as far south as Sydney.

Global sea level is rising due to melting land ice and Thermal Expansion of Oceans

Climate change is likely to exacerbate poverty, increase migration and may lead to large scale population displacement to areas including the Asia/Pacific region. (Woodruff, Hales, Butler & McMichael ,2005)

Support for the Emissions Trading Scheme Proposal.

If these threats to health and other problems associated with climate change are to be avoided, Australia needs to take strong decisive action. The science is sufficiently clear to warrant a reduction in Australia's greenhouse gas emissions of at least 60 per cent by 2050. DEA strongly supports the development of an emissions trading scheme and believes that it will play an important and prominent role in moving Australia's emissions profile towards this target. A national scheme would ideally be initiated by and coordinated by the Commonwealth Government. However as such action is not forthcoming, the joint initiative by the States and Territories Governments is to be commended.

In 2006 DEA wrote an energy policy which can be found on the DEA website. Entitled "An Energy Policy for Australia", its recommendations include more investment and reliance on renewable energy. Investment in these industries is currently impeded by the existing low price for carbon-based electricity which does not take into account the damage being done to the environment and the long term health effects of climate change.

Action is required now to dramatically decrease greenhouse gas emissions and a scheme which places a cost on carbon dioxide production is considered to be one effective strategy. It is acknowledged that electricity prices will probably rise under such a scheme.

The emissions trading scheme proposal has the advantage of not favouring one innovative energy technology over another as only time will tell what type of electricity generation will best serve us in the future.

Suggestions

It is of utmost importance that the goals of the scheme should be set in line with scientific recommendations and not confined to actions which have minimal economic impact. As Sir Nicholas Stern (2006) warns in his report to the British Government, the consequences of delaying action on climate change will be far more costly.

In taking into account the many and varied interests of stakeholders, DEA strongly advises the taskforce to set targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions which are required in order to secure the wellbeing of future generations.

DEA considers that the following aspects of the proposal may compromise the ability of the scheme to meet the required targets.

Gateways

While the proposal to have gateways would seem to make good sense, the scenarios suggested in the discussion paper appear too lax for upper and lower gateways. It is understood that investment in the energy sector typically occurs over the longer term, and that this impacts on our ability to move to less polluting sources. This should not, however, significantly shape our response to climate change. We cannot allow the task of reducing our emissions to fall largely on the years post 2030. Both scenarios 1 and 2 would seem to do this. The upper gateway should be more in line with Scenario 2, and the lower gateway should be significantly more stringent. To do otherwise would risk missing our abatement target which would put the lives and wellbeing of many, particularly those in island states and developing countries, under increasing threat.

Offsets

Forests which are considered offsets by the scheme would need to retain their carbon for a long time. Forests which are to be used for woodchip production and other uses where the carbon would rapidly return to the atmosphere should not be considered as effective carbon sinks.

Permit Allocation

A significantly higher proportion of permits should be auctioned than that currently proposed. We do not accept that existing generators need be fully compensated for reduced profitability through free permit allocation, as these generators can increase, and will increase, their revenue through increased power prices. Increased auctioning would also enable the creation of a significant pool of funds to both compensate those sections of the community who are adversely impacted by price increases. The fund could also help drive abatement projects which will not be covered/assisted by emissions trading.

Transition to NETS and Complementary Measures

DEA believes that it will be necessary to maintain the current state support policies for renewable energy and energy efficiency. Energy efficiency programs along with emissions trading will be important to prevent adverse outcomes from increased energy costs for those households most likely to notice these increased costs.

References

Bhattacharya, S 2003. "European heatwave caused 35,000 deaths" New Scientist, 10 October, viewed 5 November 2006. <<http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn4259>>

Doctors for the Environment Australia, 2006, An Energy Policy for Australia, as viewed at 21st December 2006, <http://dea.org.au/docs/DEA_energy_policy_06.pdf>

Stern N, 2006, Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change. United Kingdom Treasury, as viewed at 6th November 2006, <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm>

Woodruff R, Hales S, Butler C, McMichael A, (2005) Climate Change Health Impacts in Australia, Effects of Dramatic CO2 Emission Reductions. Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Medical Association. Victoria

Doctors for the Environment Australia