

A strategy paper for the Australian Climate Summit 2009

Philip Sutton, v6 29 January 2009

(This version has added some new strategy ideas – in the Action Focuses section.)

The latest version of this paper can be found at:

<http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/Climate-summit-strategy-paper.pdf>

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The science background

There are multiple changes occurring on the planet due to human interference in the earth's climate system - but one of the highest impact changes that could usefully drive our policy is what is happening in the Arctic. There are good grounds for believing that the Arctic sea ice could be entirely absent from the Arctic Ocean in summers as early as 2013. This will cause a jump in temperatures in the Arctic and sub-Arctic that will commit the Greenland ice sheet to full melting, eventually causing a 7m sea rise and that will most likely set off the melting of most of the permafrost causing, over time, the release of perhaps 12 times the amount of CO₂ that has been injected into the atmosphere through the burning of fossil fuels up to now.

The knock-on environmental impacts from this permafrost melting could conceivably cause, over time, the deaths of vast numbers of people (over decades), the collapse of human civilisation and the extinction of more than half the species on the planet. This impact would be much worse than the impacts of World War 1 and World War 2 and would be comparable to the impact of a global nuclear war. This conclusion sounds rather alarmist but it is a reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from published scientific work on climate change and from sober analyses of the likely impacts.

Once the melting of the permafrost has taken hold it is probable that it will keep going even if the Arctic/sub-Arctic is cooled down. This is because the biological breakdown of the permafrost releases energy that can keep conditions right for more breakdown - even when the external environment returns to a temperature that would normally keep the permafrost frozen.

Because of the long time lags in the climate/environment system and in the human economy and society, we have very little time to get the climate issue under control physically.

The ethics

Science by itself cannot tell us what we should do about this situation. We need to consider our ethical stance as well. A useful 'universal' ethical stance to guide the climate movement's strategies is to "care for all people, all species and all generations".

Safe climate (a homeostatic model)

Most official talk about the climate focuses on the question of "how much perturbation can the earth system take before it is sure to break down?" - and there seems to be an assumption that human civilisation should aim for the maximum tolerable perturbation (tolerable to the privileged?).

A better model is the one that complex living organisms have evolved – the mechanisms of homeostasis. Faced with external or internal changes that take an organism out of its optimal state, the organism has multiple ingrained mechanisms or strategies for trying to restore its optimal state. For instance, mammals and birds are able to maintain a remarkably constant core body temperature despite massive variations in the external temperature.

So in the case of the climate system we could say that the aim is to recognise when we are on a trajectory to leave the "safe zone" or have already left it and then take steps to get the earth conditions back into the safe zone and on trajectories that no longer risk going beyond the "safe zone". To not be in the safe zone means that there is always a real risk of major damage or even catastrophic breakdown.

Climate and technology goals

Let's assume that we will aim to get back to the safe zone fast enough to be sure that we can reach this goal before too much damage is done to people and other species and fast enough to avoid uncontrollable movements in the wrong direction (ie. runaway warming).

The idea of a safe *climate* should not be confused with safe *weather*. Even with a safe climate there will still be extreme weather events that could be dangerous for individual people (cyclones, floods, droughts, etc.). But a safe climate is safe for most people, most of the time, is always safe for civilisation and for all species.

Because it appears that the Arctic sea ice is already committed to being lost with the current greenhouse gas levels in the air and with the "knock-on" effects of the current temperature rise, we can say that we are already outside the safe zone and indeed we are in the early stages of the dangerous zone.

In short, the world is too hot already and there is too much CO₂ and other greenhouse gases in the air already.

So to achieve a safe climate we need to **cool the earth** - most likely by at least 1/3 of a degree C in the global *average* temperature - in order to "**refreeze the Arctic**" - to restore the sea ice cover and volume to at least the 1970 level and to refreeze the land and Arctic ocean permafrost.

To cool the earth by 1/3 degree C, we need to:

- **stop adding to the heating** (so we need zero greenhouse gas emissions), and
- to allow the temperature to fall we need to **take excess CO₂ out of the air (draw-down)** ie. removing **at least 200 billion tonnes** of carbon till we reach 300 ppm CO₂ or under.

(In the "Target atmospheric CO₂" paper, James Hansen and coauthors say that to get the Arctic sea ice back CO₂ levels in the air might need to be between ~300 ppm - 325 ppm. To be sure of achieving the sea ice restoration goal, given the scientific uncertainty, we need to aim for below that range as a precautionary measure.

Hansen, J., Mki. Sato, P. Kharecha, D. Beerling, R. Berner, V. Masson-Delmotte, M. Pagani, M. Raymo, D.L. Royer, and J.C. Zachos, 2008: Target atmospheric CO₂: Where should humanity aim? *Open Atmos. Sci. J.*, 2, 217-231, doi:10.2174/1874282300802010217.
http://pubs.giss.nasa.gov/abstracts/2008/Hansen_etal.html

By the way, for a detailed explanation of why an atmospheric CO₂ target of 350 ppm is no good, see: http://www.target300.org/350_ppm.html

- It is not yet clear whether or how much it will be necessary to **actively cool the earth** (by boosting its reflectivity) for some years until the zero emissions and draw down strategy do their work and make a third of a degree cooling possible. The active cooling strategy needs very careful scientific assessment. A key reason why this active cooling might be necessary, is that as polluting fossil fuel use is turned off the production of aerosol (particulates) pollution drops dramatically and the past aerosol pollution is rained out of the air within days. The historical emissions of CO₂ however remain for a long time in the air. So the net cooling effect of the aerosols is lost and the full, previously partially masked heating effect of the CO₂ is revealed. Thus, until the excess CO₂ is removed from the air the earth could fairly quickly heat up to 2.6 °C over preindustrial just because the old polluting fossil-fuelled technology is no longer in use.

(For discussion of how these goals might be pursued see the book version or online version of Climate Code Red. For example, carbon draw-down can be accomplished at scale by growing plant material and converting it to a char that be incorporated into the soil.)

How fast should we rebuild the economy to get to zero emissions and to create a massive capacity for CO₂ drawdown?

Al Gore has challenged the US to rebuild its electricity sector to depend on clean energy (renewables and geothermal) within 10 years (like the Kennedy challenge to get people on the moon within 10 years). Gore's argument is that the US won't treat the goal as serious and won't keep its mind on-the-job if the time frame is longer.

Arguably we are already way out of the safe zone and we run the risk of warming the permafrost so much, when the Arctic sea ice is fully gone, that we won't be able to

turn off the melting and CO₂/methane release from the permafrost. So we need to act at emergency speed. It is hard to imagine people being more motivated than they were during World War 2 - so maybe the speed of economic mobilisation at that time is a good indication of how fast humans can make economic change. Once again we are probably looking at about a decade or a bit less to make the physical changes.

Until we know better, it is probably a good idea to aim for no more than 10 years for the physical transformation.

The politics background

Australia: We now know, from the way that the Howard Government behaved for a decade and the way that the Rudd Government (and even Ross Garnaut) behaved, that mainstream politicians are not currently able to withstand the pressure of the industry 'greenhouse mafia'. This has been a bitter lesson. But we can now frame our actions with this reality in mind.

International: Bali-Poznan-Copenhagen: The movement was very disappointed by the lack of results from the Poznan Conference. But hope springs eternal with respect to Copenhagen. Perhaps Barack Obama will rescue us?

But before raising our expectations too much we need to go back to the Bali conference. As a footnote to the Bali agreement there was a reference (not a commitment) to reductions in CO₂ equivalent of between 25% to 40% by 2020 for the rich countries. Reductions of 25% - 40% by 2020 now look almost utopian when observing the response of governments and the powers behind the scenes, the corporations. So we need to recognise that even the 'best' possible result from Copenhagen will be nowhere near good enough.

Inevitably, something dramatic will have to happen after Copenhagen to put the world on the right (fast) track.

Emergency: We face an emergency situation. Business-As-Usual will not rescue us and even the usual ways of dealing with Business-**Not**-As-Usual have not been/will not be enough. We need to shake the mainstream onto an entirely new track of action.

Political goals and mode of action

Our need is to rebuild the economy in say 10 years so that it can rapidly deliver a safe climate and sustainability. But politics is showing no sign of delivering even encouraging compromises in most countries, and certainly not in Australia.

So we face a yawning, overwhelming chasm between what is needed and what seems to be deliverable through straightforward change processes. Our task seems impossible but given what is at stake we cannot afford to fail.

So, what to do?

We have good evidence that a wartime scale and pace of economic mobilisation could deliver the *physical* change we need, but this is outside the scope of normal politics.

However, a wartime scale and speed of mobilisation might be possible if society went into emergency mode, with active and willing engagement and participation of the community at large. And the emergency mode would allow us to leapfrog over past commitments that are getting in the way of rescuing the situation.

But there has to be some sort of political crisis or discontinuity to drive us into a constructive emergency mode.

Waiting for climate change disasters to force effective action is not going to work because by the time disasters come that even blind Freddy can see are driven by climate change, the climate system will be decades into catastrophic change and effective reversal will not be possible.

Is there no way through then?

A political crisis can arise from not only climate disasters but also from within society. If people realise that their current leaders are like modern day Jim Joneses leading us into collective suicide then we can revolt against this future and choose another one.

But we don't need just any old revolt. We need a revolt that, once it succeeds, rapidly opens the way for everyone, including those we have been blaming with moments before, to be able to work together cooperatively to rebuild the economy at emergency speed (emergency speed is only possible with profound cooperation). The change model of the Indian independence movement under Gandhi is undoubtedly a better model than 1917 Russian revolution. But there are no exact parallels. We are going to have to invent something new, on the fly, that meets our current needs.

If we are going to rebuild the physical economy in a decade, we have to get to 'yes', to the state of constructive emergency in which society commits to this goal in just a few years - realistically perhaps as few as 2!

To get to 'yes' in 2 years clearly calls for a social change process the like of which we have never seen before. What is needed? Perhaps a massive social mobilisation or a constructive revolt - or 'mutiny' as it has been described by Ian Lowe in recent days.

For decades the focus of our community education and lobbying has been directly or indirectly the politicians. Because we believed in the compromise model of political progress, we watered down our demands to make the demands on politicians more believable or palatable. And in crafting politically saleable demands we have miseducated the public for decades about the seriousness of the situation.

But when life itself is at stake compromise is not the right mode. At least for a substantial part of the next 2 years (as we work on getting to 'yes' on the emergency) the major focus of our campaigning needs to be focused on the community (grass roots and elites) and not primarily on the pollies at all and we need to make our chief aim to communicate the unwatered down message - of both the feasibility of fast large-scale action that can rescue the planet, and the appalling nature of the threat that

humans and other living things face. Somehow out of this hope and horror can come the necessary community outrage and commitment to make the necessary changes, that can enable us all to sweep past the obstacles no matter how huge they might be.

Movement / capability building

Safe Climate science program

No one should expect any sensible person to support the massive and rapid rebuilding of the economy if the need is not well demonstrated and the destination of the safe climate program is not well justified and specified. Climate activists need to take a more proactive role in encouraging the rapid development of a new safe climate science program.

Some scientists have the personality to take sides and speak out, but most limit themselves to the intellectual aspects of their work. So, most likely, most scientists are best engaged, not as advocates, but as technical specialists answering questions (with deep scientific integrity) that we need to get answers for. What are the uncensored dimensions and dynamics of the threats and risks we face if we remain out of the climate 'safe zone'? (the horror) What needs to be done to get back rapidly, with least human and ecological loss, to the safe climate zone? (the hope) There are a very large number of scientific questions that we need answers for - that will not be provided if the climate movement doesn't engage with the scientific community.

The science of climate change and of the restoration of a safe climate matters profoundly. Not just as a source of convenient propaganda arguments, but to guide our goal setting and the choice and sequencing of our actions and campaigns. There will be key campaign issues that we should not settle definitively until we have access to the very best, well-targeted scientific advice. Which means the movement will have to become widely skilled in climate science. (Politics and will is not everything.)

Target 300 ppm and below (and not 350 ppm)

See: http://target300.org/350_ppm.html

The seduction of the expert and the herd leader: The 350.org campaign owes its existence to mistakes made by two admirable people - Jim Hansen, one of the world's best and most courageous climate scientists and Bill McKibben, one of the world's best climate campaigners.

In 2008 Jim Hansen and his coauthors published a paper that contained valuable new science and also an unsupported political recommendation that the world should adopt a 'initial target' for atmospheric CO₂ of 350 ppm. Because Jim Hansen was a (justifiably) world renowned scientist, Bill McKibben, the activist, made the error of taking Jim Hansen's initial target of 350 ppm seriously. McKibben then crafted a massively successful but uncritical and simplistic promotional campaign around the target. The result is that now hundreds of thousands of people around the world think that climate safety can be achieved through the achievement of an atmospheric CO₂ level of 350 ppm - when in fact this cannot restore the Arctic sea ice and therefore cannot protect the world from the mobilisation of large amounts of the permafrost carbon and the loss of much of the Greenland ice sheet. This case study illustrates the

climate movement's need to develop a more scientifically rigorous relationship to climate science itself.

Saturation mobilisation

Reaching and engaging 'everyone' in a community is too hard for any group or program if they work in isolation, but if groups collaborate and share the work of outreach they should be able to achieve saturation engagement of whole communities.

An additional benefit of this saturation approach is that it should create a 'buzz' that exceeds what any individual program can generate - convincing people that 'everyone' is getting involved - an important feeling for a herd animal like humans!

This idea has been developed through the Sustainable Living Foundation but still awaits a major trial.

Plan Z.E.D. - research program

http://climateemergencynetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=85&Itemid=88

It helps morale and action when people know that it is in fact possible to rebuild the economy at emergency speed to get to zero emissions (of CO₂, methane, and black carbon), 100% renewables, and massive CO₂ drawdown. The Climate Emergency Network, with the help of generous donors, is supporting member group Beyond Zero Emissions to develop an Australia-wide plan for a zero emissions / drawdown economy in 10 years - called Plan Z.E.D. (**z**ero **e**missions **d**ecade). We hope this BZE work will stimulate complementary ideas and even alternate plans that are equally or more effective.

Plan Z.E.D. needs more partnerships with interested groups, institutions and people around the country to ensure that the plans work technically, socially and economically for the different regions and communities.

Getting to yes in 2 - research program (focused on the 'constructive revolt')

Mobilising the community in as little as 2 years so that the grip of the greenhouse mafia is broken and the society is ready and willing to take on a commitment to an emergency program for physically rebuilding the economy within the decade is an unprecedented challenge. We have to acknowledge that that we don't know how to do this - but that it must be done. This social change question, not the development of the technology for a safe climate economy, is the thing that demands a 21st century Manhattan Project. As one practical step we need to get millions of Australians to read up on and discuss the practicalities of non-violent action during 2009.

Imagining a democracy-enhancing emergency regime

The community will not see the practicality and the promise of a democracy-enhancing climate or sustainability emergency if they cannot imagine how it might work. A major piece of research and communication is needed on this.

Learning to divide campaigning into pre- and post-emergency declaration phases

People are overwhelmed by the scale and urgency of the work that needs to be done to rebuild the economy and to engage the community in the change. But most are unaware that the bulk of what needs to be done can be done efficiently, rapidly and relatively painlessly once society recognises the need to go into emergency mode and in fact makes the mode switch.

If emergency action is to move fast then of course we need to have an adequate idea of what needs to be done once the emergency mode kicks in. But the biggest

challenge of all in the pre-emergency period is not trying to initiate everything to be done post-emergency declaration, but to trigger the society to go into emergency mode as fast as possible.

We need to develop a skill for dividing tasks into the pre- and post- emergency declaration phases and we need to develop the discipline to concentrate in the pre-emergency declaration phase on those actions that really must be enacted to ensure that society does indeed switch into emergency mode.

Closing down the fossil fuel industry in Australia

This task is about as simple as stopping oil production in Saudi Arabia or Iraq!

We need strategies for alternative export income, we need a plan for constructive engagement with our customers (Japan, South Korea, China, etc.) so that they simply do not need Australian fossil fuel exports, and we need a political strategy for breaking the stranglehold of the Greenhouse mafia on the Lib/Nats and Labor and the rest of the corporate sector and a strategy is needed for dealing with the netherworld of Australian and overseas government and corporate intelligence services/operations. These are not issues that can be tackled only by bigger and more imaginative demos. Very imaginative and solid research is needed and a very creative program of engagement with the mainstream is essential too.

We also need to develop mechanisms - legal, financial, veto campaigns, and programs for alternative supply of energy for the domestic economy – that make the closure of the Australian fossil fuel industry possible – technically, economically and politically.

Action focuses

World Safe Climate Covenant

<http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/CCR.html#gsc>

Even if the world climate movement is wildly successful at Copenhagen later this year, there is no way that the world's governments will adopt targets that will prevent climate catastrophe.

Even before the Copenhagen conference is held we need to be developing a dual strategy of pushing for the best possible outcome at Copenhagen, and also knowing that even before the ink is dry on the Copenhagen commitments, people will need to be campaigning massively to have the Copenhagen protocol superseded 'immediately' by commitments that will deliver a safe climate very fast.

Even now we need to be laying the groundwork for this superseding process. The idea of the World Safe Climate Covenant is to create a mechanism now to bring together all parties that support the pursuit of a safe climate on a very short time frame as a mechanism to foster highest common denominator action on climate change. Having an alternative world mechanism in play before the likely disappointing outcome at Copenhagen is known could be very important in maintaining morale at a critical time and could be very important in fostering effective action of the next few years.

Engaging those countries/regions with the biggest leverage (as well as being locally responsible)

Australians need to play an active role not only in their immediate region (SE Asia / Oceania) but also in engaging the countries and regions of the world with the biggest past, present and emerging impacts (China, India, Japan, Russia, USA, Europe, etc.).

The hope and horror campaigns

There seems to be good reason to believe that if the public knows how 'within reach' a full solution to the climate crisis is and also how terribly bad things will be if action is ineffective then people will mobilise strongly and widely - to shake society out of a suicidal pattern of inadequate action. (This assumption should be carefully tested)

Hope

Plan Z.E.D. campaign (CEN/BZE) / FOE 100% renewables by 2020 etc. / Al Gore 10 year energy transformation challenge

It would be very helpful to engage as many people as possible in learning about very inspiring projects such as the Plan Z.E.D., the FOE 100% renewables by 2020 campaign and the Al Gore 10 year energy transformation challenge, the transition town movement, etc..

CO2 drawdown:

The world needs to draw down at least 200 billion tonnes of excess carbon from the air. Australia has to play its part. We have world class research being done in Australia in biochar production and its use. We need a campaign to scale up the carbon draw down industry and let the public know of the hugely valuable contribution this technology can make to the creation of a safe climate.

Horror

Emergency awareness campaign: The real suicidal risks of climate change need to be made known to the public at large so that people have a chance to wake up to the threat and to challenge the greenhouse mafia and the forces of inertia that are locking us into a continuation of current disastrous directions.

One key aim of such an awareness program is to flush out people who can and will take leadership roles in the push for a safe climate. It is expected that the demonstrable emergence of this leadership will more than offset the depressing effect that fuller knowledge of the climate threat might cause in the community.

<http://www.green-innovations.asn.au/Leadership.htm>

The flaw in the floor – a campaign to fix or replace the CPRS

The Federal and State Governments seem to be so out of touch with the community that they are not fussed that the proposed national emissions trading system, the “Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme” contains a fatal flaw that means that every contribution that private people make to cutting greenhouse gas emissions, frees carbon emission permits to be bought and used by ‘regulated’ greenhouse polluters. This means that new industrial pollution offsets all reductions made by the community. This flaw in the CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) completely disempowers the community when it comes to practical action. The flaw is so outrageous that the government cannot, mustn’t be allowed to get away with it.

A discussion of the problem can be found at:

https://www.tai.org.au/file.php?file=fixing_the_floor_in_the_ets.pdf

There are many other very serious flaws in the CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) that have been described by many voices – the Australian Greens, Prof. Ross Garnaut and Prof. Warwick McKibben. The Australian community should look very carefully at the possibility of blocking the CPRS in its entirety – forcing it to be withdrawn and redeveloped to be supportive of the restoration of a safe climate at emergency speed and to be economically responsible and fair to all Australians.

Demonstrating the change (physical and social) we need to see

Although, if the CPRS (Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) is legislated in its proposed form, it will physically negate the greenhouse reduction benefits of most voluntary action by householders and small firms, there are still profound reasons why voluntary actions should continue (accompanied by a massive campaign to fix the CPRS). It is important for people to see good real life examples of the changes that are needed. And it is important to keep building up the scale of industries that provide safe climate solutions. So voluntary actions are valuable educationally, and for morale and industry development and so that people can live out their convictions.

But it will also be important for people to carefully think out how they spend time so that enough time is devoted to the social and political work of getting society to ‘yes’ on emergency action within about 2 years (ie. by say the end of 2010). Crudely, home renovations without effective social and political mobilisation will be disastrous, but home renovations that feed into and amplify effective social and political mobilisation could be a lifesaver!

Adopt Canberra

Members of the Federal bureaucracy play a crucial role in carrying out the Federal Government's climate policies but they are often unaware of how disastrous these policies are and how important it is that these policies are changed/challenged. A more substantial change might be possible if members of the Federal bureaucracy engage with the climate issue in the private sphere of their lives. Such an engagement would be possible if the climate movement undertook a grass roots saturation mobilisation of the Canberra community.

Engaging the mainstream in the unwatered down message (*love that sexy slogan!*)

If the economy is to be rebuilt in 10 years then very large numbers of people currently engaged in the mainstream will need to play a major, constructive role. And people cannot do things that they haven't thought about. So there is a huge job ahead of us to engage the mainstream with an unwatered down version of what needs and can be done and what the consequences are of ineffective action.

In the past people have usually assumed that if they are talking to mainstream players they need to compromise or moderate the message to increase their chance of being taken seriously. Now though, we can't afford to fail to engage people with the full story. Introducing mainstream people through a ‘scenario approach’ is one of several useful strategies for this campaign.

No new fossil fuelled power stations

Movements in other countries, and remarkably in the US, seems to be much further down the road to successfully blocking new coal fired power stations. And in

Australia we have a profound blind spot when it comes to new gas fired power stations. Fossil-gas-fired power stations cannot fit into a fast transition to a zero emissions economy. These new gas stations need to be blocked along with the proposed new coal fired power stations.

Walk for a Safe Climate

In the past we have walked against a negative – walked against warming. Now it is time to walk for the goal we must achieve – for a safe climate – to be restored at emergency speed.

Key phrases (memes)

Caring for - all people, all species, all generations.

Safe climate

Failure is not an option

Refreeze the Arctic

Under 300 ppm

Zero emissions

Excess CO2 drawdown

Climate (or sustainability) emergency

10 year transformation/transition // transition/transformation decade

Constructive revolt

Method for the Summit

Priorities: The summit work should take priority over skills workshops, direct action and political lobbying over the weekend and even on Monday/Tuesday if there is competition for mind space and resources.

Campaigns and movement building initiatives not the only important output:

The resolution of goals and high level policy and the determination of key non-campaign actions should be seen as just as important outputs of the Summit as the selection of campaigns and movement building.

Expect multiple paradigms: We should not aim for lowest common denominator consensus - but rather should empower people to cluster around unifying visions (most likely there will be more than one) that help them frame their goals, their action in the world and their actions to boost their effectiveness.

Keep the program flexible: The summit program should emphasise open space - so that people can self-organise in ways that suit them. People could offer not only individual sessions but programs of sessions. To keep the summit community together a plenary at the start is needed and at the end of the program there needs to be time for people to see how much their plans/proposals can be drawn together with cooperation across as many vision streams as possible.