

Green Blog

Global Warming: the fight for the public mind and the future of the planet

One would think that in the face of: – visibly vanishing Arctic ice caps, the break up of huge Antarctic ice shelves, methane bubbling melting permafrost, vanishing glaciers, heat waves, record bush fires in many countries, record floods and monsoons, the last decade being the hottest on record ever, 11 of the hottest years in the past 13 years despite the fact that we are at the 11 year solar radiation minimum right now, new records for Ocean temperatures broken in 2009, Ocean Acidity increasing fast – the case was crystal clear for all to see that the Earth has been warming rapidly over the past century. With CO₂ concentrations shooting up to pass 400ppm soon, we have entered a territory of Earth's atmospheric composition not seen for millions of years – CO₂ having stayed at or below 280 ppm during those millions of years. We also have irrefutable evidence that this CO₂ excess is human made – burning of fossil fuels and deforestation being the main culprits – and the clear understanding of how CO₂ and other Greenhouse gases interact with Earth's delicate energy balance through trapping of heat radiating back to space. We also can predict with certainty where this will lead to if we carry on as we were. And the predictions are rather ugly indeed. Global average temperatures might rise by 4 to 6 degrees if nothing is done. Now if average temperatures would rise that much, many parts of the world would get hotter beyond recognition, beyond the ability of soils to retain moisture or grow food or allow human habitation. Already a large proportion of our food is grown thanks to artificial irrigation in areas that would be unproductive otherwise and sea level changes from melting ice caps would drown many of our most densely populated and productive areas.

One would therefore think that given all this evidence humanity would join forces without question and delay to negotiate a fair and equitable agreement on curbing the release of CO₂ and other Greenhouse Gasses through reduction in fossil fuel use and a reversal of deforestation.

But no, a massive PR war is now on for our minds in the attempt to derail any action on combating climate change. Greed has been the driving emotion throughout humanity's history. The urge to become richer and more powerful than our peers has driven the human agenda from the old ages through the times of colonialism to the excesses of our current time, where 1% of humanity now commands as much wealth as the combined assets of 90% of the rest of us. The machine of wealth accumulation is dependent on global economic growth. But

economic growth is dependent on growth in energy consumption. Physicist Tim Garrett from the University of Utah has worked out that throughout much of history each inflation adjusted Dollar of economic activity required 10 milliwatt in energy consumption, a number that has remained constant for centuries. Now the greedy are getting anxious that an international deal on Global Warming might actually affect their lifestyle. The global trade in oil, coal and gas commands a combined revenue of trillions of dollars annually. Even a 1% cut in fossil fuel consumption would mean tens of billions of dollars in lost annual revenue for them. A nice incentive to create some mind-bending PR one would think in the fight for public opinion. Even a brief delay in political action would be worth it to them one would think. And so a plethora of industry friendly right wing 'Think Tanks' was formed over the last decades, especially in the US, with the aim to fabricate and inject doubt and divide the world and our minds over the science behind global warming and other matters of environmental protection. The manipulation of public opinion through Orwellian twists of the truth has evolved into a "black science" through the last decades. Elections are won and lost, public support for wars generated and consumer behaviour is manipulated on a daily basis by messages coming out of the mind control research laboratories of PR firms and from marketing research labs at US and other Ivy League universities. Spiked by the message of doubt first fabricated by these "think tanks", the Internet and its Blogosphere (the jungle of highly biased and opinionated individuals standing on boxes and shouting at the rest of us) has unleashed a small army of conspiracy buffs and so called "libertarians" for whom global treaties and the mere idea of an equitable and fair reduction in consumption of our planets resources is now the "arch enemy #1". And so we get bombarded with messages such as: "Al Gore is a crook", "global warming scientists are all liars", "all climate data are manipulated", "Global warming is a communist conspiracy to create a world government", "the Earth is actually cooling", "Global Warming has stopped", "It's all natural", "Emissions Trading is the greatest scam in history", "Man has no influence over the planets climate" and on and on it goes.

NZ's own Ian Wishart, publisher of the conspiracy theory rag "Investigate Magazine" is one of the worst examples of lighting such fires and then warming himself on them. His "AirCon" book, which is a compendium of ideas to refute man made global warming, is a best seller and will net him a little fortune. Seeing him on TV the other day brought up two words in my mind: "Brian" and "Tamaki" and I shall leave the interpretation of that to the reader.

So we enter this new decade now with a people being actively divided over the issue and with a deadline looming to take action. Scientists argue that we must stop increasing CO2 emissions by 2015 and then

decrease them to zero by 2060 if we want to avoid triggering tipping points in Earth's climate that would take the issue out of our control entirely through unstoppable feedback mechanisms and into an irreversible warming which would make our planet uninhabitable for us in the long term. The race is on to develop a sustainable future that is worth while to hand to our grand children and this decade is the decade where we must act decisively. There is no other option. By the time you read this the Copenhagen negotiations may have set a direction. I hope it will be the right one.

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