

P r o g r e s s

A post-Kyoto plan gathers pace

Australia is centre-stage in global efforts to design a new 'post-Kyoto' plan to fight climate change. Spearheaded by national think tank The Australia Institute, the new initiative has drawn together some of the world's most influential climate change scientists, academics, activists and politicians. **Alan Tate** reports.

When the International Climate Change Taskforce meets in Sydney in November, the aim will be to finalise recommendations to world governments for a new climate treaty to be implemented when the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. Those recommendations will be presented early in 2005.

Since early this year, the Taskforce has been assessing options for a post-Kyoto treaty. The challenge it set itself is to find a global framework to control greenhouse emissions that will be acceptable to all nations – including the US and Australia – and which will forestall dangerous climate change.

Mounting scientific evidence on the rate of global warming and its impact is spurring increasing numbers of policy leaders to accept climate change as the overriding global challenge of the age. And because of the long-term nature of the problem, international and national policy designed to address it will influence and guide broader sustainability policy for decades.

As one of only two countries that have rejected the Kyoto Protocol, Australian involvement in developing future multi-lateral climate responses has declined over the last three years. The federal government has focussed instead on negotiating a series of mainly technology development-based bilateral agreements with other countries – principally the US.

But the establishment of the Taskforce, and the leadership that Australian participants are playing in its work – has provided a fresh opportunity for involvement and influence in mapping a global approach that may drive actions for the rest of the century.

The Taskforce was established by three leading think tanks: the Institute of Public Policy Research in London, the Centre for American Progress in Washington DC, and The Australia Institute in Canberra.

It consists of 16 eminent people from the United Kingdom, US and Australia, as well as major developing countries and continental European countries.

'The year 2005 will be a critical one for international negotiations on climate change, and it is vital that Australia makes a constructive contribution to this new phase of the debate', Dr Clive Hamilton, Executive Director of The Australia Institute, explained.

The geographic representation of the taskforce reflects the desire to bring the two countries that have rejected the Kyoto Protocol, the US and Australia, back into the multilateral process. It also reflects the need for full engagement and support from developing and continental European countries.

The Australian members of the taskforce include NSW Premier, Bob Carr; Ms Cathy Zoi, former head of the NSW Sustainable Energy Development Authority; and

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Professor Tony McMichael, one of the world's leading experts on the human health impacts of global warming, who is based at the Australian National University.

International members include Dr R K Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which advises the United Nations; Mr Tim Wirth, former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs in the Clinton Administration; and Sir Jonathon Porritt, Chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

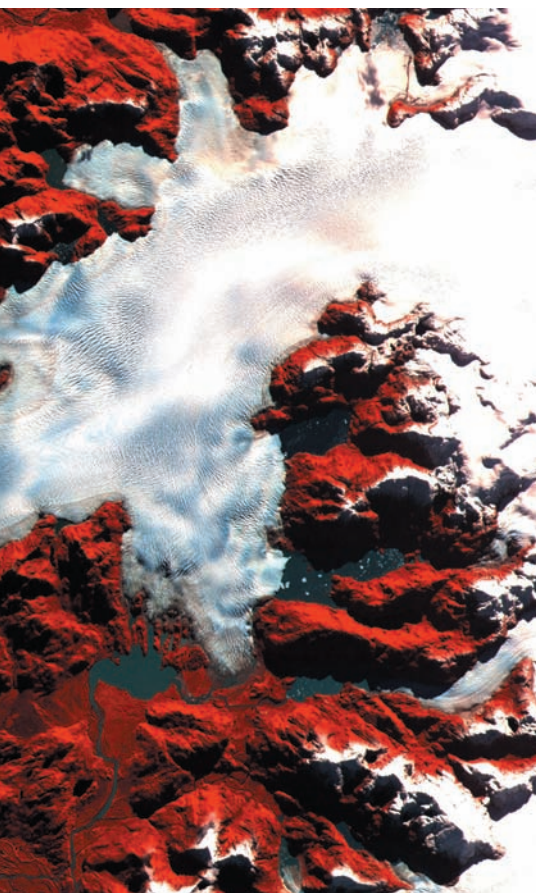


A false colour composite image of the North Patagonia Ice Sheet, Chile, dramatically showing (vegetation in red) a single large glacier, covered with crevasses. A semi-circular terminal moraine indicates that the glacier was once more extensive than at present. NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory (NASA-JPL)

'Over time climate change will affect everyone in NSW', said Mr Carr. 'My position on this is clear – I firmly believe Australia should ratify the Kyoto Protocol; the Advisory Committee I appointed last year confirmed that ratification is in Australia's economic interests, and my Government is proceeding with policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the State. However, climate change is a global phenomenon that requires a global response, and that's why I'm very pleased to be part of this high-level global initiative that seeks to identify a framework for action beyond the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.'

In a unique international cross-party collaboration, the Taskforce is being co-chaired by former British Labour Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Stephen Byers, and US Republican Senator Olympia Snowe.

'The Kyoto Protocol was a milestone for



the international community in taking the first step to address the danger which climate change poses', said Mr Byers. 'The Taskforce will help safeguard and build on Kyoto by identifying new ways to secure international cooperation and support. For the future, we need to find the means by which we can involve those countries that have not ratified or are not bound by Kyoto, so that climate change can be dealt with effectively over the long term.

This will be a major challenge but it is one that the Taskforce is confident it can meet.'

Today's climate reality presents governments with far more serious implications than when the Kyoto Protocol was negotiated seven years ago. The consequences of global warming are now readily apparent, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events such as droughts, floods and hurricanes occurring with increasing frequency and ferocity across the world.

While the main cause is emissions from industrial nations, the worst impacts fall mostly on the developing world. But as Australia's current drought and associated water crisis demonstrates, even wealthy nations cannot protect themselves from the human and economic costs.

It is this national common interest in fighting climate change that perhaps presents the Taskforce with its greatest opportunity to find consensus on the way ahead.

Ensuring its recommendations are politically acceptable to all nations is the greatest challenge. Equity and fairness between countries in setting future greenhouse commitments are, therefore, key principles for the Taskforce in considering forward policy options. So too is the need for both short- and long-term global emission reduction targets that meet the need to forestall dangerous climate change.

The Taskforce's detailed work is to:

- set global emissions on a pathway to deep cuts by the middle of this century
- ensure a greater number of countries are subjected to emissions constraints
- bring the US and Australia back into a global climate policy framework
- effectively facilitate the transfers of technological and financial resources that developing countries will need to combat climate change
- incorporate action on adaptation as well as mitigation.

The Australia Institute and Australian Taskforce members are playing a leading role in the development of the work, which includes:

- research into the impact on economic prosperity of deep emissions reductions over time in industrialised countries
- a review of the options for securing the participation of developing countries in a global framework to mitigate climate change
- research into how investment mechanisms can be strengthened to help secure the participation of developing countries in the transition to a low-carbon economy
- an assessment of what the latest scientific evidence indicates regarding the speed of climate change and the extent and strength of impacts.

The November meeting of the Taskforce, in Sydney, will reach a consensus on a set of proposals. These will be set forth in a report, to be published in early 2005, which will be presented to British Prime Minister Tony Blair and representatives of other governments worldwide. Mr Blair, who warmly welcomed the establishment of the Taskforce, intends using his positions next year as head of the EU and of the G8 to broker a new climate treaty acceptable to all nations.



Dr Clive Hamilton, Executive Director of The Australia Institute The Australia Institute



US Republican Senator, Olympia Snowe United States Senate/University of Maine



Mr Tim Wirth, former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs in the Clinton Administration UN Foundation



Dr R K Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change US Department of Commerce

More information:

See The Australia Institute website: <http://www.tai.org.au>

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Alan Tate is a partner in sustainability consultancy 'Cambiar', and serves on the Secretariat of the International Climate Change Taskforce.