

GLOBAL WARNING (Things you need to know about Global Warming)

The continuation and possible worsening of the great dry that has spread over most of Australia appears at last to have brought global warming onto the politicians' radars. That result was inevitable; the only question ever was when would it occur. Many of us thought not for some time yet, probably not until one or two more giant storms like Katrina. But un-dramatic as it is, the dry is affecting all of us because of its duration and intensity. The concern now is that it has happened far sooner than most of us expected. This in turn, has been interpreted as indicating that the intensity of global warming is greater and the speed of its onset faster than, at least mainstream forecasters, have previously predicted. If that is the case, it is a matter of grave concern for all of us.

In predicting the extent and effect of global warming, there are two wildcards that need constantly to be borne in mind. These are what we refer to as the **Time Delay Effect** and the **Chain Reaction Effect**, and both seem to have entered into the equation without so far, attracting widespread comment.

What is meant by these effects is this –

Time Delay Effect

In 1979, the then U.S. President, Jimmy Carter, requested a full report from the National Academy of Sciences in respect of the then new, but growing scientific opinion that said the earth was warming and that the primary causes of this were human activities. A group of scientists was formed into a panel we now know as the Charney Panel (after its leader) which reported to the president in the following year that if CO₂ continued to increase there was "no reason to doubt" that climate changes would result and that they would not be negligible. That report marked the commencement of the scientific drive to lower the level of carbon in the atmosphere to a level (as calculated subsequently) of about a third of what it was in 1990.

What is not so well remembered from the panel's report is that it went on to warn President Carter of the inherent time delay effect of atmospheric carbon. It said that the climate changes set in motion by the emission of carbon based gases would not manifest itself until "several decades" after that emission occurred. In other words that if, as we believe, the big dry is substantially carbon gas driven, it is the result of carbon gas emissions of some decades ago.

As the panel also said, "*We may not be given a warning until the CO₂ loading is such that an appreciable climate change is inevitable*" (the underlining has been added). To put it simply, by the time the manifestations of carbon gas emissions appear it is already too late to prevent them or the problems they cause.

This has become a serious problem for scientists trying to warn the rest of us about this massive problem we call – global warming. Far too often their listeners, unable to see the manifestation of all the pollution that has gone before, treat the warnings as alarmist because they cannot visualise what the manifestations will be 'several decades' down the track.

Chain Reaction Effect

Increasingly, members of the scientific community are making clear their dismay that the politicians have by and large failed to heed warnings that scientists have given back as far, at least, as 1970. Even today, some politicians cannot bring themselves to contemplate emissions trading. Others cry out for a new agreement to replace the Kyoto took over seven years to negotiate (once described to the writer of this article by a key negotiator as unbelievably fast for an international treaty of this magnitude) and a new agreement can hardly be expected in a shorter time. Still others insist on Australia having some right to do nothing unless emerging nations like China and India are made to commit to targets like those applied to the industrialised nations specified in Annexure B of the Treaty, apparently unaware that the reasons for this were debated and were acceptable to Australia back in 1997 when it signed the Protocol.

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What concerns scientists most is that there are events already occurring that should never have been allowed to commence. These include, but are by no means restricted to, the melting of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets and the melting of the permafrost.

Most scientists have assumed that action to reduce carbon gas levels would occur as soon as they, the scientists disclosed the existence of the problem of global warming, or if not, then no later than when an international treaty was agreed, which occurred in 1997. It is fair to say that many of them thought the example of the holes in the Ozone Layer would apply as a yardstick. In that case fairly prompt action did occur.

The possibility that the permafrost might melt causing the release of massive quantities of methane and CO2 or that the great ice sheets might also melt causing a huge increase in ocean levels was consistently downplayed or simply not mentioned. The reasoning was that prompt action was capable of preventing any of these events occurring and that prompt action would surely be taken. Scientists felt they should not be seen to be alarmist by raising possibilities that then appeared to be totally improbable.

But this has not happened and things have now changed. We no longer have the justification for a 'slow and steady' approach. A degree of urgency has rightly entered into the debate that the politicians can ignore only at their political peril. We are now told not only of the environmental disasters that will occur if we continue to sit on our hands, but the economic and social disasters as well. We are told that this is the greatest challenge to the world since World War II and even that is a considerable understatement.

We in Australia need to understand that those nations who are pulling their weight will have little sympathy for the nation and they have every right to regard as collectively dragging its feet. If they commence using their ability to retaliate economically, can we really blame them?

So to conclude, this article says that we need to anticipate far stronger measures both nationally and internationally.

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