

## Views from Auckland: Take Another Look At Climate Change

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One of the unintended consequences of the global financial downturn is bound to be its effect on climate change initiatives of countries across the world.

As their economies hurtle into recession, governments are being hard-pressed to come up with urgent bailout plans ranging from the merciless slashing of interest rates to the direct injection of billions of dollars into their banking systems while simultaneously engaging in belt tightening across the board.

Climate change—and the associated costs of committing to its schemes—will undoubtedly be on the backburner at least for some time.

Putting its reputation as one of the world's greenest nations on the line, the newly elected National Party-led government in New Zealand is already taking a hard look at the climate change policy formulated by the previous Labour-led government—something it had promised to do in the run-up to the polls.

Rather than commit to a policy that will ultimately lead to an increase in taxes by millions of dollars and potentially put the country's important farming sector at a severe disadvantage, the new government has said it will now put all things on the table for careful consideration before it comes up with a new policy. The rest of the world will closely watch its moves with great interest over the coming months.

This slowdown in climate change initiatives wrought by the financial downturn may be a good idea for many countries to take a breather and a long hard look at the whole scenario—particularly from the point of view of new emerging science that is increasingly at odds with the science on which current climate change initiatives are based.

Perhaps more research on climate change has been done since the Kyoto Protocol than ever before and a lot of this research is bringing alternative causes for the world's changing weather patterns to the fore than the prevailing view of anthropogenic (man-made) global warming as a consequence of carbon emissions.

In the next few years, if further scientific research tilts towards non-anthropogenic causes and proves that to be indeed the case (as many indications already point towards), then the whole business of carbon taxes and emissions trading would have been based on mere conjecture. And economies that have gone down that path would have much to regret. Climate science is too new and there is too little we know about its real causes and how it affects the world. Realisation is slowly dawning that it would be wiser to consider as many scientific views as possible before committing billions of dollars to schemes based on imperfect science and conjecture. The New Zealand Government has undoubtedly realised this.

While considering conflicting scientific views, governments will have to be wary enough

to see through the politics within the scientific establishment and consider all theories dispassionately.

### **Other viewpoints**

Almost all debate on climate change today is based on the prevailing anthropogenic carbon emission view. Little consideration, if any, is being given to other points of view based on sound science—perhaps for fear of upsetting the anthropogenic applecart on which a whole commercial model has been built.

For instance, little appears in the mainstream media about the fact that as recently as 6,000 years ago the world was three degrees warmer than it is now.

There is also strong evidence that as the world came out of the millennium long ice age about 11,500 years ago, temperatures went up by 5 degrees in just about 10 years. Now, how does that compare with the 0.6 degrees that the world got warmer by in the past century, according to climate scientists? And remember, there were no industrial carbon emissions then.

Little also appears in the media on the relationship that scientists are increasingly finding between solar activity and climate patterns on earth: there is a correlation between fluctuations in the brightness of the sun and our weather patterns. This correlation is far more pronounced and immediate, according to scientific observers, than that between carbon dioxide and change in weather patterns.

According to these scientists, the sun is to enter one of its weakest 11-year sun spot cycles in the past couple of centuries and they predict that temperatures all over the world will be cooler.

This is expected to happen in just over a decade, in the years following 2020 when the sun enters the sun spot cycle (also known as the Schwabe Cycle).

So according to this scientific view, we are in for a period of global cooling rather than global warming.

In light of such continually emerging research, it would be impossible to predict with any certainty how climate change will actually pan out in the next 100 or, say, even 50 years. Each theory's modeling throws up a different scenario and it would be premature for countries to formulate complex trading systems like carbon credits based on any one of these theories. The fact of the matter is that science is too young and that we simply do not know.

It would not only be wiser but also immensely practical for the world to set up a fund and a mechanism to develop strategies on addressing the tangible and clearly visible effects of climate change.

There is no denying that climate change is a reality. What we don't know is what causes it. As scientists sort out the science part (which may take decades simply because more research gives rise to more observations and newer theories), the world needs to evolve strategies to address the vagaries of climate change at the practical level.

The Pacific Islands representatives who joined the citizens of other low-lying countries of the world in putting up a united voice at the climate change conference in Poznan, Poland last month were right in bringing the human factor in the spotlight.

People affected by climate change must desist from pointing fingers at the developed

world for having caused sea level rise because of their carbon emissions. That argument may not hold true as new scientific discoveries unfold in the not too distant future. Instead, people from the islands—especially threatened atoll ecosystems like Tuvalu and Kiribati—need to put ever-increasing pressure on the world community to focus on the practical problems that they face as a consequence of climate change on purely humanitarian grounds and the human rights angle. Based purely on the human aspect, that indeed is a far more compelling proposition than finger pointing based on any imperfect scientific theory. Happy New Year, all.