

Combet: 10 big errors

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Ten more faulty assertions from Climate Minister Combet

Climate Minister Greg Combet delivered a [major speech](#) at the National Press Club on April 13th entitled “*Tackling Climate change in the National Interest*”.

The earlier part of Minister Combet’s speech traversed various scientific issues, which we analyse below, putting his statements in bold type, and our commentary in ordinary type.

1. The evidence of atmospheric warming is very strong, and the potential for dangerous climate impacts is high. The scientific advice is that carbon (sic) pollution (sic) is the cause.

Atmospheric warming and cooling happen the whole time naturally, and global temperature has been level or cooling gently for the last ten years; and that despite the fact that a quarter of all human emissions of carbon dioxide, over all of history, have occurred since 1998.

No empirical evidence has been provided, and especially not by the IPCC or Professor Steffen, that a significant part of the late 20th century warming was caused by human carbon dioxide emissions. Instead, warming alarmist arguments rely upon computer modelling and assumptions about positive feedback from moist air and clouds.

Neither has any evidence been provided that the number or intensity of dangerous climatic events has in the near past fallen outside of normal natural variation.

The term “carbon pollution” is a pejorative term that displays ignorance by those who use it. In reality, the public debate is about the magnitude of the warming effect exercised by human carbon dioxide emissions. Carbon dioxide from whatever source is an environmental benefice that sustains most of the ecosystems on planet Earth.

2. Globally, 2010 was the warmest year on record, with 2001 to 2010 the warmest decade. 2010 is the 34th consecutive year with global temperatures above the 20th-century average.

Were this true, so what? The world has been in a warming trend since 1680, the depth of the Little Ice Age, so of course later years tend to be warmer. Human carbon emissions were insignificant before 1850 and tiny before WWII, so human-sourced emissions are obviously not the sole cause of warming.

But in fact it isn’t true. Amongst the major records of global temperature, only one shows 2010 as the warmest year since global thermometer records began (about 1850). That record is the NASA GISS index compiled by James Hansen, and its limitations and inaccuracies are well known. The temperature record used by the IPCC is the U.K. Hadley Centre’s HadCRUT thermometer plot, and the most accurate record of all is that measured from satellites (which covers nearly the whole planet, not mainly airports and carparks). These two records show that the 2010 global temperature was 0.2 and 0.1 deg. C below the warm peak attained during the 1998 El Nino year, respectively.

More generally, all versions of the 20th century thermometer temperature record on which the Minister places his reliance are of limited accuracy and also encompass a warming bias. Representing, as they do, only 3 climate data points, they are a completely inadequate basis on which to make grand statements about climate change.

Judged against climate records of adequate length, the temperature has been declining gently for the last 10,000 years (since the Holocene post-glacial climatic optimum) and increasing for about the last 330 years (since the depth of the cold Little Ice Age around 1680). So it is no surprise (i) that overall warming occurred during the 20th century; and (ii) that 2001-2010 was a relatively warm decade, for the same reason that most of the warmer days each year cluster around mid-summer's day – in both cases, the grouping of warm temperatures is because of position within a known climatic cycle.

3. In Australia, each decade since the 1940s has been warmer than the preceding decade. With rising temperatures we can expect to see more extreme weather events, including more frequent and intense droughts, floods and bushfires.

In some places, each successive decade of the last 50 years may indeed have been warmer than its predecessor, for the same reasons explained under Point 2; the Earth is currently still recovering from a Little Ice Age.

But Australian temperatures, and those in other regions, do not move in perfect synchronisation with global temperatures, because of regional scale circulations and responses to multi-decadal climate oscillations. So whereas southeastern Australia (and offshore waters) started warming around 1950, after nearly a half century of flat temperatures, they have (along with global temperature) also stabilised over the last decade. But, in any case, it is global temperatures that are the point at issue, not Australian ones.

In the early 1970s, some climate scientists were full of talk about global cooling and the looming possibility of a new ice age -- they based their alarm on the fact that the global thermometer record had been falling for the previous three decades. These scientists also cited models that showed that a new ice age might indeed occur (their models, like the current ones, were loaded with too much positive feedback). Minister Combet is now apparently claiming that the 1945-1975 cooling didn't occur in Australia. Perhaps he is relying upon a temperature graph that has been revised in retrospect?

The accompanying statement that extreme weather events have increased with warmer temperatures is contradicted by the available empirical evidence - and that they will increase or become more extreme in the future should warming resume is derived from speculative, unvalidated and invalidated computer climate models.

4. The environmental consequences translate readily into economic costs - as well as potential negative impacts on water security, coastal development, infrastructure, agriculture, and health.

Natural climate events and change do indeed impose economic and social costs, as the bushfires, floods and cyclones of the last few years in Australia readily show.

There is no evidence whatever that these costs have been greater in recent years because of human influences on global climate.

5. Professor Will Steffen, a leading expert in the climate science, has advised the Multi-Party Committee on Climate Change that there is 100% certainty that the earth is warming, and that there is a very high

level of certainty it will continue to warm unless efforts are made to reduce the levels of carbon (sic) pollution (sic) being sent into the atmosphere.

Professor Steffen is spectacularly wrong.

The earth is NOT currently warming, and hasn't been for the last 10 years, and perhaps longer. That this lack of warming has been accompanied by increasing carbon dioxide levels proves that carbon dioxide is not the predominant controlling influence on global temperature.

Neither Professor Steffen nor any other scientist can state with certainty whether global temperature in ten years time will be warmer or cooler than today. But given the currently quiet sun, and acknowledging the importance of multi-decadal climatic oscillations such as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, many scientists currently hypothesize that cooling is more likely than warming over the next two decades.

6. It is in our national interest to take action on climate change. The national interest case is clear.

It is indeed, and the climate events and change that the Minister should be paying attention to are those KNOWN hazards of natural origin. Because the government instead is focused upon the entirely HYPOTHETICAL risks of dangerous warming caused by human-related carbon-dioxide emissions, it has taken its eye off the main game.

The national interest case for better preparation for natural climate events and change is clear, and it is past time that the Minister focused on it.

7. Climate change is an environmental problem with an economic solution.

This is an absurd statement, which should read "Climate events and change cause environmental and social damage, and are therefore an economic cost".

For natural climate events and change are obviously hazards with attendant economic costs, and they are more costly the less prepared that we are - as the Victorian bushfires and Brisbane floods have clearly shown.

Perhaps "climate change" (as the Minister intends the term to be understood) is an invented problem to justify a desired and particular political "solution"? Be that as it may, whatever the Minister is referring to here is certainly not based upon science as we have learned to practice it over the last two centuries.

8. Just as the 1980s reforms laid down the bedrock of our current prosperity, pricing carbon (sic) will ensure that the Australian economy of the 21st century remains globally competitive.

Competitive with whom? Australia will be way out in front in leading de-industrialisation and economic decline, for no other countries are proposing to handicap themselves nearly as much on a per capita basis.

Putting a rising tax on carbon dioxide will have one, and only one, result, which is to render the Australian economy more and more uncompetitive against its overseas competitors, with a concomitant inexorable rise in the cost of living.

At the same time, a tax on carbon dioxide will do nothing to effect global temperature in a measurable way.

9. Intergenerational equity is a key determinant of long-term economic policy making. Our obligation is to leave the world a better place, not to pass on the problems we found too difficult to deal with to our grandchildren and to their grandchildren.

The government's Climate Commissioner, Professor Tim Flannery, has indicated that some computer models that he favours project that a period of 1,000 years or more will be required before any cuts in Australian carbon dioxide emissions take effect.

The intergenerational equity that the Minister speaks of is therefore like King Canute being held responsible for the living standards of present day Australians. It is astonishing that such fantasies are now being introduced into public discourse by government ministers who, King Canute-like in their turn, appear to believe that they can "stop climate change".

In any case, there never has been intergenerational equity. The gross inequities that exist across both geography and generations are caused by contrasting access and lack of access to cheap energy. It is estimated that 1.5 billion persons today lack adequate sanitation, clean drinking water and basic health care and education. Such poverty kills innumerable persons in developing countries each and every year.

There is no equity in restricting access to cheap energy, and future restrictions on cheap sources of energy such as coal will condemn millions to future poverty or death.

10. Australia is one of the world's top 20 polluters and we release more pollution per person than any other country in the developed world – more than the US. Not only is it in our national interest to act, we have a responsibility to do so.

Carbon dioxide is not a pollutant, but an environmental benefice.

Even according to the IPCC's faulty models, if Australia stopped all emissions of carbon dioxide from tomorrow, the total effect on the temperature in 2050 would be to theoretically lower it by 0.0154 °C.

Regarding real air pollutants, Australia has good controls on industrial emissions through clean air legislation, and it is unlikely that our pollutant emissions are significantly higher than other western countries with similar controls.

Which is not to say that further improvements to air quality might not be effected, especially in metropolitan areas. Indeed, expenditure of public money on that (to demonstrable effect) would be a far preferable course of action to squandering money on cuts in carbon dioxide emissions that will have no effect on either pollution or future climate.

Final remarks

The later part of the Minister Combet's speech is concerned with political and policy matters which we do not analyse in detail. We note, however, that the relevance of these issues depends entirely upon whether there is a dangerous global warming problem to deal with in the first place.

Minister Combet provides no evidence whatever that there is.

Authors:

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They are the four independent scientists who together advised Senator Steve Fielding during his discussions with Climate Minister Penny Wong over her proposed emissions trading bill in 2009.

See also:

"Global warming: 10 little facts" [here...](#)