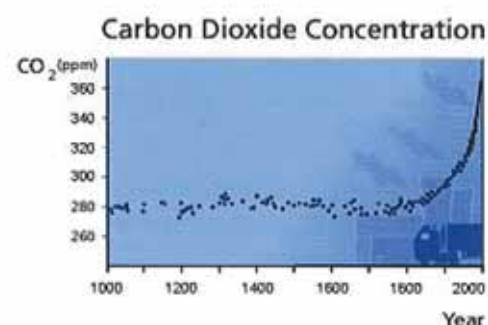


The Big Picture With Dick Clarke



Some criticisms of the Stern Report highlight the following issues:

- Sets the atmospheric carbon target for 2050 too high, at 550 ppm¹ (twice the pre-1850 level). The IPCC² reckons between 400 and 450 ppm is a better target.
- Stern's strategy is actually unlikely to limit CO₂ levels to 550 ppm by 2050, which is troubling indeed. World growth will likely exceed the 2 to 2.5-fold increase in energy demand forecast by Stern, assuming business as usual for the global economic machine.
- Stern's logic is possibly simplistic in its assumption of the way energy demand is predicted (flat arithmetic



growth curves which do not take account of consumer feedback loops).

On the other hand, Stern has motivated economic

rationalists to embrace the "stitch in time" approach by expressing sustainability in terms they can understand³. If nothing else, this is an important platform for further work in this area. That makes it sound as if economists of that ilk have hitherto been unaware of the changes happening out here in the real world, which is surely not universally true. But if the cap fits?

Recent articles in Solar Progress⁴ by Ted Trainer, and in ECOS⁵ by Matt Brace challenge the Stern Report, and even carry arguments for fundamental economic reform to change the way wealth (or its benefits) are generated. ANU's Richard Eckersley looks to history for instances of 'profound shifts in our view of ourselves, in what it was to be human'. Once upon a time child labour was normal, acceptable, even seen as an economic essential. Within 50 years it was completely eradicated. In the 1800s women could not vote, but by this time last century the tide had rapidly turned. These are just two massive and sudden social changes we can learn from.

"Let's just keep growing, consuming, polluting. There are no limits, nothing is finite."

Changing economic systems from 'growth-based' to 'steady-state' is possibly our next big hurdle, and perhaps

Recently I took part in a friendly (but very competitive!) debate with the topic "That the window of opportunity for humankind to become sustainable **has closed**." The normally affable Chris Reardon was cast into the opposing team, arguing that it has in fact closed, whereas I was given the brighter opposing view - which aligns with my own - that it is not yet too late. Or is it? Am I turning away from my traditional "glass half full" towards a "glass half empty" personality type - would love to illustrate with a great Farside cartoon here, but the Ed's fretting about copyright!

I was surprised at how easily arguments were formed by the other team, and equally surprised at how jealous of that I was. My team struggled to put cogent arguments together within the allotted three minute preparation time, whereas across the room, arguments just keep leaping onto their notepad from the ether. Well, maybe less from the ether and more from common experience and gloomy expectation.

The debate was declared a win for the other side, although we put it down to the corrupt conduct of Reardon and his crew: more than a few glasses of red found their way into the hand of the adjudicator. Then we all got back to the serious business of saving the world - changing the building industry from within, lobbying governments and revving up regulators, cajoling and coercing consumers. Even writing the odd thesis about it in our spare time!

Eat, Drink and be Merry

For tomorrow we get Stern

Then along came the Stern Report Well bugger me, an economist talking sustainability - surely the corner had been turned, the hill crested, the trough bottomed, the window found ajar at least!

'Spend a dollar now on the right measures, save nine later' - it is the stuff of my father's "money" lectures to me as a teenager. It even made our Prime Minister start talking carbon trading - surely cause enough for euphoria! But as I started to research Stern's report, some messages seemed to be missing. Criticism of its assumptions and even its basic logic appeared not only in right wing economic circles, but from within the environmental movement.



without clearing that one, we will never halt climate change. Runaway global warming (> 4°) will in itself cause massive social and economic change, being the whole point of the Stern Report. But Stern continues the assumption that growth-based economies are not problematic in the long

term. It's an assumption we may well have to seriously reconsider within our working lifetimes. The assumption is based on a mere 200 years of human history – prior to that, other systems existed. It may well be that we need massive change, rather than incremental change in order to clear the closing window.

So, I may not be the eternal optimist I once was, but even if the world and everybody in it is going to hell in a hand basket, working for change is still the right thing to do. Simply because, morally it is the right thing to do. And, if we all do it...

After a weekend with Al Gore: Where is the Aussie mindset really at?

If you have seen An Inconvenient Truth (and you better have, coz if you ain't, I'll be round to your place with me own version to keep you awake all night!) you may have noticed two things. Hopefully in addition to the main argument.

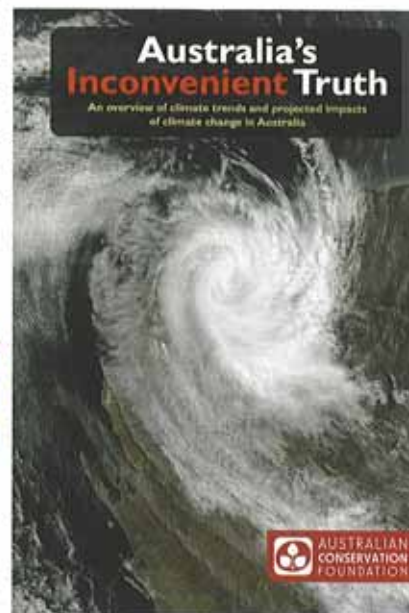
You may have noticed that it focuses heavily on the impact of things like Hurricane Katrina on the American psyche. And, that it spends a lot of time proving that climate change is real, that it's happening now, and that certain human activities are the cause.

I was fortunate enough to spend a weekend with its maker Al Gore, learning its content, polishing delivery skills, learning crowd control, all for the purpose of taking my own version of the slideshow to people in my personal network. Don't get too jealous – I was one of 85, so it wasn't quite an intimate tete-a-tete. But it was good! Gore is convinced that Australia is at a tipping point – ready to start seriously moving on from questioning the facts, to start delivering solutions. He is aware that solving problems is something humans are

generally pretty good at, and Aussies maybe more so than most. He is also aware that we are not as buried in self-obsessed ignorance as some other people may be, although at times I wonder.

"Hi – my name's Al Gore, I used to be the next President of the United States, then something happened in Florida..."

We can all wonder what might have been, if a particular event had turned out a little



Dick Clarke, Al Gore and Bernie Hocking




differently. I always wonder how my life would have been had I not missed the first 45 minutes of my first form (year 7) yearly maths exam, ironically because I was studying for it in the school library and forgot the time. It proved a useful excuse for why I did not get into the top maths class the next year, and no doubt my HSC mark suffered for it. Would I have been the next president of...? Nah – it's not a problem (really). But I digress...

Where is the Australian mindset in the first half of 2007, as we head into federal elections? As we head into further consumption, further debt, further environmental degradation? If Mr Gore is right, we should see evidence of change now. Let's do a quick check of two greenhouse problem sectors:

Transport

We should be seeing big commitments from governments on public transport (no?); rail freight (can't see it); and people buying smaller cars (bingo – one out of three!). Note who is doing the leading here – people way ahead of government. In 2003, when the new



Consumer Attitudes

"The Australian consumer feels limited personal responsibility for the effects of their choice of vehicle on social or environmental outcomes.

Auto manufacturers have already dramatically improved cars compared to what we used to drive and government standards ensure that we are buying responsible cars. I can choose whatever I want without any guilt and I do".

VE Commodore was being developed, the head of strategic planning at Holden described the Australian car buyer as someone who cared so little about social or environmental outcomes that they would continue to buy big fuel-hungry rear wheel drive cars⁶. The VE Commodore is currently selling at only 60% of sales targets. He got it wrong, the people changed, and he didn't see it coming.

Building operational energy

We should be seeing big leaps in energy efficiency (some, in buildings like Melbourne's CH2, Sydney's 30 The Bond, but nothing noticeable from programs like BASIX); big reductions in domestic air conditioning sales (nope, still on the up); uptake of efficient lighting (yes, slowly). Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore is leading a symbolic gesture on city lighting with Earth Hour⁷ – local government assisted by the print media – state and federal governments nowhere to be seen (at time of writing). Let's not forget the continuing lack of encouragement of building-integrated photovoltaics from state and federal governments.

These two quick surveys show more leadership by 'we the people' than governments, who seem to be playing catch-up. This gives the optimist within me great encouragement. (Then my next-door neighbours built an uninsulated extension and installed an air conditioner... but that leads to another story⁸. Current debates about using recycled water as a component of town water supplies also seems to be leaving governments behind, although here Queensland is a trend-breaker, with Toowoomba residents trapped by a fear/smear campaign, and the state government showing more initiative.

If the people are ahead of government thinking, the nuclear debate will be a good litmus test. Perhaps the federal election will hinge upon it. The stakes are high – 248,000 years is a long time to wait for a bad decision to disappear. "Hi, my name's Kengo⁹ – I'm a human being, I used to live on a blue-green planet.



1. Ppm – parts per million. Currently atmospheric CO₂ is at 380 ppm and rising fast, up from long-term averages of 280 ppm.
2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – generally accepted as being the foremost authority on CO₂ levels, includes Australia's Dr Graeme Pearman.
3. Imagine only being able to understand numbers. Surely economists also feel love, get emotional, and have exciting thoughts outside of fiscal policy debates. Too many "know the price of everything and the value of nothing." (one of Wilde's)
4. Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Solar Energy Society, and with ReNew Magazine, is delivered free to every ATA member as well. See www.ata.org.au
5. CSIRO journal reporting on science and news behind sustainability and industry – a truly excellent read. www.publish.csiro.au/ecos
6. Ian McCleave, Director Business Strategy and Planning, General Motors-Holden, presenting to the Australian Automotive Chamber of Manufacturers, 2003.
7. Earth Hour – turn the lights off for one hour on March 31 at 7.30pm. See http://competitions.f2.com.au/enter.cgi?competition=earth_hour
8. BASIX in NSW is not preventing crappy buildings from being thrown up by an industry whose only raison d'être is to make a profit at everybody else's expense. Will it be any different in WA?
9. Kengo copyright ahajokes.com

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