

I'm doing something about global warming.



CHAPTER 6

WHAT ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT?

You can't hit a target you cannot see, And you cannot see a target you do not have.

- Zig Ziglar



George Monbiot in his book *Heat* asks 'What is the point of cycling into town when the rest of the world is thundering past in monster trucks?' and 'Why bother installing an energy-efficient light bulb when a man in Lanarkshire boasts of attaching 1.2 million Christmas lights to his house?' Whilst I am a firm believer that every little

action makes a difference, the climate crisis has reached a point where it demands much more than tokenistic actions. If we are to reach the 90% cuts in our emissions that are required (and what science demands), the government needs to create laws and regulations that force all of us to change the way we live and the way we do business.



Vested interests within the fossil fuel industry and industries that can't survive without fossil fuels as well as short-term political vision

have limited and constrained political action regarding climate change. The White House is a clear example of this, where the U.S. President George W. Bush has links to running a number of oil companies including Arbusto Energy, Spectrum 7 and Harken Energy Corporation. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, sat on the board of directors of Chevron (a corporation engaged in every aspect of

the oil and gas industry) and the Chief of Staff from 1993-1998, Andrew Card, was the former president of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association (just to name a few vested interests).

George W. Bush has placed representatives of polluting industries or environmental skeptics in charge of nearly all the agencies responsible for protecting America from pollution. For example, Mark Rey (a timber-industry lobbyist) was appointed to oversee the U.S. Forest Service and Elizabeth Stolpe (a former lobbyist for one of America's worst polluting industries) is an associate director on Environmental Quality. It is therefore of no surprise why the American Federal government has failed to take serious action in this area.

The Kyoto Protocol (an international agreement that created binding targets on developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions) was created and negotiated in 1997 and entered into force in



2005. Kyoto aims to reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse gases by 5.2% below the 1990 greenhouse gas levels between

2008 and 2012 (Developing countries are however exempt from this). Of all the countries that have ratified Kyoto (over 160) only 35 are legally required to stick to their specified targets. Australia and the U.S. are the only two major countries that have refused to be bound by Kyoto's restrictions. They refuse to ratify Kyoto for the following reasons:

1. It would have a negative impact on the economy;
2. The Kyoto Protocol is inequitable as it does not require developing countries such as China and India to fully participate; and
3. The emission targets are arbitrary and not based on science.

It is true that the emission reduction target of 5.2% is not based on science. Science is demanding 90% cuts in emissions! So, where are we headed if our government can't even commit to a 5.2% reduction? What kind of message does this inaction send to countries like India and China?



It is no wonder that many of us are frustrated with governments and have stopped participating and/or taking an interest in the political process altogether. It

is easy to feel that the rich and powerful interests overpower our voices and that there is very little point in speaking up. Never assume that your vote and voice doesn't count. The 2000 U.S. Federal Election clearly proved that every vote does count with only 537 votes determining who became president. We have reached a point where our

engagement in the political process is more important than ever before.

Fortunately, several states and grassroots action groups have been proactive and are doing what they can to combat climate change. Many U.S. states have set their own targets to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through increasing their use of renewables, selling agricultural carbon sequestration credits, and encouraging efficient energy use.



California (the 6th largest economy and the 12th largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world) is an example of one U.S. state that has set its own targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Scientists and economists in the state of California reported that if

California continued on in a business as usual

fashion regarding global warming, it would suffer from 30% to 90% less drinking water, more wildfires and risks to agriculture in the near future. Based on these alarming findings, the California legislature enacted tough new laws (*The Global Warming Solutions Act*) that impose a cap on greenhouse gas emissions. Major industries in California will be forced to cut their output of greenhouse gases. California's target is a 25% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and it is hoped that their efforts will inspire other states and the Federal Government to follow in their low carbon footsteps.

The Portuguese government has become a renewable energy champion after years of being dependant on other countries for coal, gas and oil. Prime Minister Jose Socrates has a goal that renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and wave power account for nearly half of the electricity consumed in Portugal by 2010. This is certainly an achievable target since 36% of Portugal's electricity

output came from renewable sources in 2005. Land outside a town in Moura has been allocated to build the largest solar wind farm in the world. This project is expected to benefit the community and create over 1000 jobs in a shire that currently has 900 people unemployed. Portugal is showing the rest of the world that we can make the switch to renewables and the economy doesn't have to suffer.

Australia and America are screaming out for a change of government and it won't happen unless we properly educate ourselves about the issues (check out www.publicagenda.org to explore issues) and candidates (www.vote-smart.org) through trustworthy sources (TV commercials and unsolicited mail don't count). Political change won't happen unless you vote, so make sure you do it!

