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Fair climate reporting must include economic facts



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Whose interests are editors at the climate catastrophist Guardian, the Nine Network newspapers and ABC radio and television representing when they publish climate alarmist stories but never question the economic costs of policies they support?

Failure to think of the costs of climate action cost the Labor Party dearly at the May 18 federal election. Former leader Bill Shorten refused to reveal the cost of his proposed 50 per cent CO2 reduction target by 2030, telling reporters the real question was what would be the cost of not taking such action.

Back in the Howard years many in the media understood the Coalition's proposed emissions trading scheme taken to the 2007 election aimed for "least cost abatement". Economic cost was the main reason 15 years ago I started publishing Bjorn Lomborg, director of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre. Lomborg's analysis of costs and benefits should be one of the barometers by which Paul Barry's Media Watch measures media climate reporting.

But at The Guardian, which has swallowed the least likely scenario from the International Panel on Climate Change to sign on to a "climate emergency" by 2030, cost and effectiveness of action just don't enter into it. It told readers last Tuesday under the headline "It's time to act" that "We want the Guardian to play a leading role in reporting on the environmental catastrophe". US editor John Mulholland said: "The climate crisis is the defining issue of our lifetimes, and informs all our journalism." He was not exaggerating.

The Guardian supports the most expensive solutions knowing they will do almost nothing to change the climate. Even if adopted in full, they will remove only 1 per cent of the CO2 that would need to be mitigated to meet the IPCC's 2C warming target. This is the worst kind of "look at me" media gesture politics.

Let's check some facts:

1. The 2030 Paris Agreement will cost the world between \$US1 trillion and \$US2 trillion a year by 2030 to reduce total CO2 emissions by just 1 per cent, removing 60 billion tonnes of CO2 when 6000 billion tonnes need to be removed to limit warming to 2C. If the world did nothing the total cost according to the UN's own climate science panel would be the equivalent of a reduction in incomes of between 0.2 and 2 per cent over the next 50 years. Not nothing but not the end of the world either.

2. Lomborg says since the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit tens of billions a year have been spent on solar and wind energy but the proportion of global energy derived from renewables has risen only from 13 to 14 per cent. Most of that 14 per cent is hydro-electric power or the burning of wood. Yet this year alone the "world will spend ... \$230bn subsidising renewable energy, propping up inefficient industries and supporting middle-class homeowners to erect solar panels".

3. The Parliamentary Library in Canberra in late 2017 reported 621 new generation units were under construction at coal-fired power stations globally. Steaming and coking coal are Australia's biggest export industry. Despite constant false media predictions the coal industry will soon die, why no Media Watch denouncing of such false reporting?

4. Industry Super, no friend of the Coalition, reported in June in favour of a nuclear power industry because of problems associated with renewables. We have among the highest penetrations of renewables in the world, but you would not know from reporting by the ABC or Guardian. The intermittent nature of wind and solar power is affecting the reliability of the national grid. Renewables advocates say viable storage technologies will arrive eventually. Industry Super says Australia would need 100 Snowy 2.0 projects at a cost of \$700bn just to power the nation for a day and a half. We could build 150 nuclear power stations for that. Looking at South Australia's giant Tesla battery, nationwide battery storage would cost \$6.5 trillion (trillion that is, so four times total annual GDP) to power us for a day and a half.

5. No matter what Australia, with 1.3 per cent of global emissions, does, CO2 emissions will continue to rise because of growth in China and India. As developing countries, they are allowed to keep increasing emissions to 2030. The idea that in such circumstances Australia can help stop a global "mass extinction" is ludicrous, and editors should demand environment writers call it out. If the UN really thought a mass extinction was near it would immediately renegotiate climate agreements with developing countries.

Mentioning economic facts is not climate denial. But not mentioning such facts does constitute denial of economic reality. Lomborg says the answer is increased spending on research and development to create technologies that can help remove CO2.

At least one Guardian writer hit on an honest answer over a decade ago. George Monbiot, a climate alarmist, conceded, correctly, that anyone who really believes climate change is an existential threat needs to come to terms with nuclear power. This was more honest than trying to make political points linking every drought, flood and storm to climate change, as if mankind had not faced such natural weather variability for thousands of years.

The best environment writers used to represent all sides of a story. The late Brian Woodley at this newspaper was renowned for maintaining strong relationships with logging workers, the timber industry and the green lobbies in his forestry industry reporting.

Environment writers should accurately report what climate scientists say. But they should also report what economists and scientists in disciplines such as physics, astronomy and geology say. Climate science is a relatively new field and many in it know their computer modelling is far from perfect. The sun and the Earth's core are the main sources of heat on our planet, so media sneering at reporting of the work of astronomers and geologists on climate is infantile.

Throughout human history, confronted with ocean flooding, humans have built levies to prevent inundation or moved to higher ground. Only very recently have scientists persuaded otherwise rational people the answer is to try to alter ocean levels by eating less meat, using less fossil fuel, flying less or driving an electric car.

Apart from the fact that many ocean specialists do not accept sea levels are rising and there is ample tidal evidence that in some places they are in fact falling (such as in the middle of Sydney Harbour) not all climate scientists agree on the solution. Prominent climate scientist Professor Judith Curry, once an IPCC lead author, had another suggestion in her testimony to the US congress in February. How about building more resilience into our coastal developments for a start?

Curry, who says CO₂ will warm the planet eventually but the worst effects will not be felt until 2100, believes CO₂ cannot be regarded as a thermostat for the world's temperature. That's why less experienced scientists are trying to deplatform her.

Yet there may soon be more deplatforming in the other direction. The evidence from London last week suggests the public is too smart for some of the media hype on climate. Extinction Rebellion protesters may themselves be "deplatformed" by people who have had enough of economic envy dressed up as climate concern.

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