



The Sustainable Engineering Society

...engineering in harmony with ecology

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE STATEMENT FROM SENG

CLIMATE CHANGE

It is beyond reasonable doubt that our climate is changing as a direct result of human activities that result in greenhouse gas emissions. This will seriously impact humanity with increasing the longer that it takes to mitigate against the activities. The question is why is society not taking due action when the causes, risks and consequences have been extensively documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and all major national academies of science.

Global emission reduction actions are crucial if global atmospheric temperature rise is to be constrained to two degrees above the pre-industrial level - the generally accepted 'safe' limit. What should be Australia's contribution to this global effort?

Current policies are shaped by a reluctance to move 'ahead' of other developed economies in adopting stronger emission reduction targets because of perceived economic disadvantage for trade exposed industries. Furthermore, climate action has been politicized for short term electoral advantage and to protect investment in fossil fuel mining and consumption.

Australia's exported emissions through coal and gas substantially exceed its entire national emissions but are accounted against the country where these fuels are burnt. Directly and indirectly, Australia is a significant contributor to global emissions. These exported emissions dwarf any reductions that result from domestic policies such as the carbon price.

Policy considerations for the future should take into account:

- Australia's 'moral responsibility' as the highest per capita emitter among developed countries;
- Its particular vulnerability to climate impacts;
- Its ability as a mid-sized advanced economy, to be an exemplar to other countries, possibly accelerating global action;
- Long term benefits of phasing out coal mining and export, thus reducing world coal supply and hastening a global shift to cleaner energy sources;
- Economic benefits from being an early adopter in transforming industry to low emission technology and stimulating R&D in this sector.

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30 July 2013

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