

Governments are just beginning to wake to the reality of climate change. It's taken just some three decades of concentrated scientific discussion and warning. The latest, just released and genuinely alarming *Climate Change 2007* summary report of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](http://www.ipcc.ch/) (IPCC – <http://www.ipcc.ch/>) builds on a now huge body of accumulated scientific effort and the work of thousands of scientists.

It confirms the long suspected and raises grave questions: most of the unusual and extreme climate events the world is suffering – for us drought followed by fire – have been caused by rising green house gas concentrations in the atmosphere generated by industrial societies in the 20th Century. In that century, average global temperature has risen by 0.76C. So small a temperature shift and so huge the impacts. What kind of climate disruption will follow temperature increases that are very likely to be 4 and could easily as much as 8 times as high in the 21st Century. That's the question the IPCC raises.

Even if they are only now unfolding before our eyes, the implications of climate change will be profound. Our daily lives will be touched in hundreds, indeed, thousands of ways as we live with more drought and other extreme weather events here at home. Further a field, in the early years of the 21st Century, the Greenland ice sheet was melting at 4 times the rate prevailing in the last decade of the 20th. We will need to change many habits, globally we will need to live with diminishing economic possibilities – but also with a global population that rises to 9 billion by mid century. At best we will have to cope with rising costs, restrictive regulation – and at worst with a whole new range of security threats generated by a desperately need on a degraded planet.

We can easily accomplish most of that in about two or three decades. Just dither, bicker and continue as we are. It will be much harder not to – and harder still to undo if don't now pull out the collective finger. Amongst other things, we need to rethink the character of our democratic community. We must, if we are to avoid the worst, reach forward to future generations and outwards to 6 going on 9 billion fellow humans as we discover that we have something new in common them – a finite and fragile planet in need of care.

Humans – and other life forms – need the planet in order to continue with a miraculous adventure story that started about 3.8 billion years ago. Could we really halt that story at its high point, in that last remarkable 3 million year chapter that tells of upright apes? John Howard, although rubbing his eyes like Rip van Winkle, is still running the favoured business line: if it means more expensive fuel and power bills, if it means reduced international competitiveness, then too bad for the walking ape, and a bit later, the talking ape. What's their share market price? We hear that human futures aren't doing that well...

This guy, as they say, is on the money – like many of his colleagues, he has perhaps become a fast talker, too fast for his own good. His chatter has regressed too. It no longer engages fully with the world. Listen to Peter Beatty, John: "you drink water or you die". The walking ape knew that even before it could talk. Take a deep breath and meditate on that... and on the air you breathe. Just for a moment or two. First air and water – and food and ecological life support services, John. Then profitable business and jobs and the national interest. The latter have to adjust to the former... and not the other way around... the latter have to adjust to the former... and not the other way around. Until you realise that, John, you're not really being practical. In fact, you're off the planet. No longer engaged with the world.