

(2) Nature's economy comes first – even at the ABC

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The press is full of climate change discussion now - following Stern and Gore last year and the IPCC a couple of weeks ago. Yes, the issue is commanding a lot of column inches and air time at the moment. But much of that space and time is actually devoted to discrediting the case for caution or those who argue for far-reaching change....

The most obvious and fundamental implication of climate change remains taboo: the simple proposition that the human economy must adjust to nature's economy or planetary ecosystems if you prefer. Ecology comes before economy. Say this and you're dismissed as a fanatical feral or greenie who puts ideology before practical need and common sense. John Howard's leans back in his chair, smug and sanctimonious. The appeal to common sense is always a killer and the sharpest interviewer rendered limp and helpless....

But, of course, the very opposite is true: to say that dinking and breathing and eating and the conditions that make it all possible.... to say that this comes before jobs and interests rates and profits is the most common and practical sense imaginable. Here, Peter Costello needs to learn, are economy's real "fundamentals". What's ideological about that? Peter Beatty got it for five minutes all by himself. Yet our media sharp shooters refuse or are unable to ask these simple questions: they inhabit or are confined within the same cultural space; they live in John Howard's neighbourhood if not at his precise address. There'll be no penetrating inquiry here.

So, in huge amount of time and space given over to noise and nonsense, this central and singularly important proposition is never debated. [New Limited](#) and [PBL](#) can't and nor can the ABC's deep thinkers. The moment you say human enterprise must seriously give way to the planet, that drinking and breathing come before employment and export revenue, you mark yourself as a lunatic, intelligent perhaps, but flaky. The obvious is off limits. The sense of cultural outrage is palpable too: we are modern industrial humans and we're in charge of the planet, not vice versa. And all the more so if we're rich and making money out of it. In the end, the resistance to authentic ecological restraint involves such unsophisticated longing and brutal psychology.

Allow yourself to be interviewed by Fran Kelly at dawn on the [ABC](#) or by Tony Jones on [Lateline](#) before bed. Early in the morning or late at night, you'll be subjected to the withering scorn and primitive ritual punishment. Dismissive ridicule over the airwaves: "You couldn't really be saying...." It's that strange and somehow treacherous thing called criticism in the service of the status quo. And then their sense of gloating triumph heals and re-affirms a good, sensible and practical world. We can go about our day's business confidently or go to sleep feeling secure. Fran and Tony are on the bridge.... And in between lot's of lesser lights.

Bob Brown risks this on a daily basis but he survives because he is clever and gentletough and has a constituency able to think more independently even than the ABC's stable of super smart current affairs journalists. Tim Flannery – accomplished scientist, brilliant science communicator and Australian of the Year – may see all of that symbolic capital evaporate in his hands because he dares to speak up for the priority of planetary conditions that enable us to go on breathing and drinking and eating. Yes, that's the argument now...

Of course coal miners and others must be looked after and that might be a big public expense. Is that what our hard liberal government and its softer oppositional shadow are saying no to? A dangerous amount of sharing? Now I'm starting get it. But wouldn't it be great if there was a space for this argument to be made without inviting the wrath and ridicule of those very capable cultural police officers at the [ABC](#)?