

## **Garnaut favours internationalist strategies — and will soon be very lonely**

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First the bad news: the human species is currently discharging 28 gigatons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere each year. That's about twice as much as the planet can reabsorb into terrestrial and marine carbon sinks — so we should be cutting back to half of that as quickly as possible.

Of course, everyone knows that isn't happening, but not many people know the full extent of our failure. Garnaut's monster draft review ([http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/WebObj/GarnautClimateChangeReview-FULLDraftReport\\_4July2008/\\$File/Garnaut%20Climate%20Change%20Review%20-%20FULL%20Draft%20Report,%204%20July%202008.pdf](http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/WebObj/GarnautClimateChangeReview-FULLDraftReport_4July2008/$File/Garnaut%20Climate%20Change%20Review%20-%20FULL%20Draft%20Report,%204%20July%202008.pdf)) brings us these measures. On current trends, as he reads them, we are scheduled to *double* current emissions to some 59 Gt by 2030.

Let's explore the numbers for a moment longer. In the absence of effective global policy, we could well be adding around 30 Gt of carbon dioxide equivalent (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Co2e>) to the current global burden over the next two decades.

Now here's the really staggering bit: of that amount, all but three Gt will be from developing economies. By 2030 the developing world will account for three quarters of aggregate global emissions: 43 of 59 Gt.

If we have not already crossed some threshold of irreversible planetary change by that time, we will certainly be well on the way to doing so.

One or two further depressing points: the critical threshold will be reached even if the developed world reduces its emissions by half or — if it were possible — altogether. If Garnaut has the numbers right, the developing world *alone* will be moving toward planet-threatening emissions levels well before 2050.

Speaking ruefully (and unauthorised) for the developed world, our fate will very soon cease to be in our hands. The exact point at which we become historically irrelevant can't be identified but, like most bad things associated with climate change, it's uncomfortably close and getting closer.

The future is now or soon will be completely in the hands of billions of mostly poor humans in a grim and unprecedented democratisation of history.

A few economists apart from Garnaut are on to this, but the numbers and their implications have yet to hit the ordinary concerned citizen or make their way into the every day discussion of climate change. How has this happened? After all, isn't our world now routinely filled with the clamour of climate change policy proposals and counter proposals, blogs, newspaper stories, television debates, documentaries and even movies?

Can emissions large enough to sink the planet really have been overlooked or go unnoticed?

The answer is “yes” and it is not entirely a matter of their low visibility. It is also because we do not want to see. Popular and political discussion would often prefer not to see or reckon with these emissions. They raise even more problems than the emissions we are ourselves responsible for in the rich world — and coming to terms with the latter is still hard enough for some.

Nor is this particular to Australia. Similar patterns of activity and evasion — of selective engagement perhaps — are evident throughout the developed world, even though others may be a few steps ahead of us (Europe) or a few steps behind us (North America) in broad policy development terms.

The result of this ambivalence in the developed world is a wider global community that lacks full comprehension of the problem at hand. It is unduly focussed on the less problematic part of the world — which happens to be the part of the world in which it lives.

That’s called distorted judgment. For the rich to devote attention almost exclusively to their own immediate environs and to disregard the wider global environment known to be the major source of hazard is just irrational. Our efforts at home — however clever, arduous or well-paid — are in vain.

There is a standard response to such criticism and it goes roughly as follows: every nation is responsible for its own emissions so each should attend to its own part of the problem; and no nation can afford any (or much) more than that.

There are problems in the response. It is deeply dishonest and to make that worse, the dishonesty is likely to cause lots of death and damage.

Populations in the rich, developed world have stabilised at about 1.1 billion. Aggregate and per capita incomes are high and education and skill levels are miles ahead. In other words, we have the capacity to deal with the challenges of climate change — both those of mitigation and adaptation. (<http://www.postkyoto.org/coffee.pdf>)

To be sure, the developed world has its own vulnerabilities but generally speaking, this is the profile of a resilient community. Of course, everyone would prefer a world not subject to climate change problems at all, but given that they exist, the developed world as we know it could hardly be better placed for dealing with it.

Just the opposite applies to the developing world. Its emissions growth rate is 9 times as high and its total emissions burden will be twice as great as that of the developed world well before 2030. This will be partly due to continuing population growth — taking the number of people from 5.5 to perhaps 7.5 billion in the next two decades. Of course, where emissions are growing, national incomes will be growing too. As will per capita incomes — but much more slowly if population is also growing rapidly.

Lots of emissions and lots of poor people will mean scant surpluses to deal with climate change crises at all levels of engagement, but especially longer term mitigation.

We need to pause for a moment and be brutally honest about income and economic progress here. When we insist on self-financed mitigation in the developing world, we are talking about subtractions from incomes that may be growing but are still doing so from very low levels. Thus, the movement might be from US\$4 (average daily income in the developing world) to \$5 or \$6 daily. Or it might be from US\$10 to \$15 — \$10 is the average daily per capita income in China (as compared to US\$80 in the developed world).

Of course, we all look to our own home first and even though it is an odd impulse in a post-modern and globalising world, it's still the case today. But anyone who is minimally literate as an ecologist knows, somewhere inside themselves, that climate change is a kind of planetary announcement saying: "I, the planet, spaceship Earth or Gaia (if you are James Lovelock) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Revenge\\_of\\_Gaia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Revenge_of_Gaia), I am your only home!"

Of all the problems that face us as social or biological beings, climate change is the last one that should now result in introversion. We are, in fact, appealing to or indulging cultural orientations whose time has passed. Indeed, they have helped cause the problem. Living in nations has prevented us from occupying and seeing the world as a whole.

The entire 1.1 billion of us who make up the developed world are too small a number to solve the world's carbon emission problem. If we don't apply ourselves — our wealth, our surpluses, our financial and our human capital — to the other world in which 5 going on 8 billion are heading for aggregate emissions of 43 Gt per annum, our efforts in our customary homes will be in vain.

Of course, climate change as it relates to the developing world is hardly a new policy frontier. It has, in fact, been the subject of formal political attention since the UN's Earth Summit in 1991, and has made further formal progress over the following 17 years with ratification of the UNFCCC in 1994 and the Kyoto Protocol in 2004. To get to where we are now, stuck within the imaginative horizons of the nation in 2008, earlier international achievements had to be undone. Only for that reason has it been possible for this thundering gigatonnage to sneak up on us.

To undo work done the 1990s and to retreat from the Kyoto Protocol was also a cumulative achievement involving not just a few years but a decade or more of destructive chafing and refusal on the part of the US and Australia. I have argued elsewhere that this destruction culminated in Bali in 2007 where crucial first principles were shaken almost to death. The principle of differentiated responsibility was the most important of these. It enjoined the obvious: that the rich would, could and should pay for the poor where the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation were involved. <http://www.postkyoto.org/BaliAbstract.pdf>

So, were those principles broken? We'll see in Copenhagen. But to come back to Garnaut, who makes a promising contribution to this discussion. Garnaut clearly understands the importance of international perspectives and action and, better still, is unafraid to loudly register the point. He not only gave us the numbers, he was, for an economic liberal, quite unafraid of their implications.

His report has a shot at repairing and modernising the damaged UNFCCC principles as he designs the architecture of a possible global emissions trading scheme. It demands more of the rich in terms of climate change assistance for the developing world than any document of comparable standing. Where I still find it a little timid in this regard, the Rudd Government, social democratic though it professes to be, will find it a little too cosmopolitan.

The Government's just released Green Paper on greenhouse emissions appears to confirm this suspicion. I see no trace of Garnaut's bolder proposals for more determined developing world assistance measures. Only the usual meaningless rhetoric. This must now be a tacit understanding within the Labor Government. Remember how Peter Garret's enthusiasm on this question lost him the Climate Change portfolio a year or so ago?