

## **Farmers bear the brunt of reducing greenhouse emissions**

Climate change deserves attention, and the Sydney Declaration of APEC nations last week is a step in the right direction. But is the APEC aspirational goal of a reduction in energy intensity of at least 25 per cent by 2030 enough? Could we do better?

The World's response needs to be better than this to have an impact on Global Warming and rising sea levels over the next 25 years. In Australia we could do a lot better, but with energy use in Australia increasing by 40% between 1990 and 2005, a 25% reduction will be a pretty impressive turnaround.

The pace of change in Australia is too slow. Rather than wait for the United Nations to talk about achievable programs for a few more years, Australia should develop some bold targets and get on with the job.

Not much has happened in the ten years since the Kyoto Protocol. The Australian government tells us we are on track to meet our targets for greenhouse gas emissions, but the real situation behind these figures needs closer scrutiny.

Australia's national greenhouse accounts show emissions were only 102% of 1990 levels in 2005, compared to a target of 108% of 1990's emissions by 2005. The figures say greenhouse gas emissions were kept down, but at the same time power emissions, mostly electricity produced from coal, rose by 36% between 1990 and 2005, while motor vehicle emissions rose 43% over the same period.

The reason the greenhouse gas emission targets were met to some extent, was due to a 74% reduction in emissions from land use change, effectively produced by a halt to tree clearing.

Farmers have borne the brunt of reducing greenhouse emissions, while the Federal Government has done very little. Tree clearing has helped to make us look good, but over the last fifteen years, people in Australia have installed many thousands of airconditioners and generally increased energy use by 40%.

Even the greenhouse accounting for tree clearing is dodgy. Why, because tree clearing was largely over in southern states before 1990, and in Queensland the tree clearing 'accounted for' after it was stopped in 2003, was mostly tree clearing in dry western areas where carbon storage is minimal and clearing was part of an ongoing 40 year cycle of regrowth, vegetation thickening and stagnation of tree and pasture growth.

Whilst the government has concerns that increasing energy costs will result in inflation and make Australia less competitive, there are many ways in which greenhouse gas emissions can be cut without much cost. Energy saving programs, better building designs and farming methods which store rather than emit carbon are examples.

Using natural gas as a vehicle fuel would not only be cheaper than petrol or diesel, it emits less carbon dioxide and would improve our balance of payments by reducing fuel imports. It is likely we can produce renewable fuels for the same cost as petrol, with additional benefits of less imports and increased taxation revenues flowing to the Commonwealth.

Transport fuel is a big contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Australia. Investment in more efficient railways to take thousands of trucks off the highways between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, should have a positive economic outcome as well as help climate change.

Some forms of alternative energy, such as wind and solar power cost more. But consumers in Australia have shown support for green power by paying more for their electricity. A small amount of subsidy on 'green' power, paid for from a tax on 'coal' power would reduce the price difference to make green power more attractive to consumers. Such a tax arrangement could be managed to encourage investment in alternative power projects to ensure all new power supplies are 'green' and/or there was investment in projects to capture carbon dioxide from old fossil fuel power plants.

A bold approach is needed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by more than 50% over the next 25 years. There are plenty of green energy alternatives in this country which might appear on the surface to be more expensive, but if the jobs, taxation income and import replacement effects from home-grown economic activity is considered, it is likely it might even improve, rather than reduce our standard of living.