

Steve Goldthorpe wrote 3rd March 2010

Hi Warren,

Thanks for your email and your comments. Good luck with the mayoral electoral campaign.

I would caution you against thinking of Climate Change as something that that people have a choice about believing in or not believing in. In years gone by many people believed that the earth was flat because that was their experience. Their belief did not change shape of the planet which was, is and always will be spherical. It does not matter how many people choose to believe or not believe in Climate Change the fact remains that the massive redistribution of carbon on our planet, due to exploitation by homo- sapiens of fossil fuel, has destabilised the planet. A new dynamic equilibrium is slowly being established. The future will be different from the past. No amount of wishful thinking will change that. Instead of denying what we don't want to happen, like an ostrich with his head in the sand, we should be embracing the knowledge of future trends that is made available to us and be working out how best to adapt to the changing reality.

New Zealand is well behind the rest of the world (so what's new) in thinking. Twenty years ago the well-informed view was that the Global Warming mechanism was unproven. Responsible world leaders then adopted a "Precautionary Principle" in planning for the future, but they did not start a process of weaning the world off its addiction to the consumption of fossil fuels, because it was politically unacceptable. We now know much much more about the way the planet works and we have had a further 20 years of transferring ever increasing amounts of fossil carbon into the atmosphere. There is now no longer any doubt that the consequence of burning fossil fuel is a gradual rise in average global temperatures causing fundamental changes in climate patterns and rising sea levels. The uncertainty now is only in how much and how soon?

I share your concern about the Emissions Trading Scheme, which has been dreamt up by the wheelers and dealers of the world as a way of pushing money around in circles allowing a few to get rich whilst not actually tackling the core problem of fossil fuel use changing the balance of the planet. The logic of the ETS goes something like this. The use of fossil fuel is changing the planet. If we slow the rate of use of fossil fuel then the rate of change will be more tolerable. But people won't change their behaviour without an incentive, so we will set up a scheme to make fossil fuel more expensive (A Carbon Tax) to provide that incentive. But some ways of reducing emissions are cheaper than others so we will let people who can't easily change their behaviour pay someone else to reduce emissions instead. But there isn't enough low-hanging fruit around to meet that need, so we will allocate emission permits to fossil fuel users according to their business-as-usual emissions less a bit, and then when they reduce their emissions they will have surplus credits that they can sell to other people who need to increase their emissions. But individual trades at individual negotiated prices are very messy, so we will set up a trading market with a common floating price, which disconnects the actual emission reduction from the

economic outcome this allowing windfall profits to be made by some industries. That will encourage industry to participate willingly in the trading system. Hence a whole new pseudo-financial currency system has been created to give the illusion of action.

When the ETS was proposed, the Green Party had a long discussion about whether or not to support it. I argued that the scheme should not be supported because it was fundamentally flawed and was unlikely to actually achieve the original objective of reducing fossil fuel use. However, the balance of opinion was that moving towards putting a price on carbon was better than doing nothing, so the Greens supported it. It is still a political football.

Bringing matters closer to home, the question of how much sea level rise will occur and how soon is a critical issue for Whangarei. It has fundamental implications for the design of waste water systems, storm water systems, marine facilities, salt water intrusion into ground water and liability to flooding of low-lying areas. The WDC staff with the responsibility for planning for the future have followed MfE guidance in taking Sea Level Rise into account. However their consultants have taken old MfE guidance (2004 report based on data from the last century) of 0.5 metres of sea-level rise by 2100. They have taken no account of continuing sea level rise for centuries to come. MfE have since updated that advice, and there is additional authoritative evidence now pointing to the likelihood of a sea level rise of 1 to 2 metres by 2100 and increasing by one metre per century thereafter. WDC have taken no account of that long term issue in their planning. Hence they are possibly setting future generations up for huge liabilities. I consider this to be grossly irresponsible. I will continue to lobby council staff on the issue.

Should you get to be mayor this year I will be pleased to provide you with more deeply considered reasons for taking a more responsible approach to making our district future proof.

Best wishes

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