

5 September 2004

The Honorable John Howard MP  
Prime Minister of Australia

Mr Mark Latham MP  
Leader of the Opposition

***The future is not what it used to be, indeed the future is not mandatory***

***"The stone age did not come to an end because of a shortage of stones and the oil age will end long before the world runs out of oil." Sheikh Zaki Yamani, Saudi Oil Minister (1962-1986).***

Dear Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition

Australians are increasingly concerned at the polarisation of approaches to action on climate change. The issues that are at stake are too fundamentally important to be treated in this way.

Climate change is recognised by security experts, major international insurers and re-insurers, scientists, and financiers, as well as ecologists, as the biggest security threat that humans have ever faced and there is no precedent in history for us to draw from. Our cherished way of life is at risk.

Our legacy to future generations is an exponential growth curve of cost and this must be changed - we can no longer bill our energy intensive and waste intensive way of life to our children and grandchildren.

We want our next government to galvanise national action to address the real threats and opportunities facing Australia. Australians look to Federal and State Governments to work together to create an action plan that meets community expectations of the Government's role to develop a safe, secure, economically sound and competitive future that is underpinned by a healthy environment. Australia needs a long-term strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 60 per cent by the middle of this century.

This is a huge ask of industry and to deliver on this demand Australia needs and deserves a national energy policy that will create a vision of the future that we want. From there we must create a strategic pathway that will enable Australia and Australian companies to seize opportunities and to provide leadership based on a framework of solutions to climate change threats.

Although Australia's GHG emissions account for only 1.2% of the global amount, this country will suffer more negative impacts from climate change than any other developed nation. Currently, our nation records the highest per capita greenhouse emissions in the OECD. It is in our own vested interest to reduce our carbon footprint and to provide world leadership by example. Importantly, Australian innovation should assist developed countries to develop their economies without greenhouse overload. Australia has provided such leadership many times in the past on other major global issues. It is time to reassert that tradition.

While some people have questioned the significance of climate change, it is critically important to be aware that throughout every ice age for last 800,000 years carbon dioxide levels were about 200 parts per million (ppm), and throughout every warm period for the last 800,000 years they were about 280 ppm. Because of our inefficient use of fossil fuels over the last half century we have broken that ice age/warm period cycle. We are currently at around 379 ppm – and rising - and moving into the first hot period for 800,000 years<sup>1</sup>. These unprecedented changes to the forces that control our climate, weather patterns, and agricultural productivity threaten the way of life of each and every Australian.

Quite simply, change of this speed and magnitude may mean that many eco-systems will be unable to cope. Then the services provided by nature that we take for granted<sup>2</sup> could break down completely<sup>3</sup>. That is the only cost in the whole climate change debate that Australians and the rest of the planet cannot afford.

We must not be daunted by the scale of the challenge. Australia's prosperity and competitiveness depends on seizing the opportunities for change.

Yours sincerely

List of signatories

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Sir David King, Chief Scientist, UK

<sup>2</sup> Clean air, fresh drinking and irrigation water, agricultural productivity, ocean fish stocks, waste assimilation, inter alia

<sup>3</sup> Rising temperatures (0.7 degrees centigrade in Australia to date), more severe weather patterns, rising sea levels, more frequent and severe droughts, bush fires, disease migration, increasing salinity, soil erosion and sterilisation, and waterway degradation can all be attributed, at least in part, to climate change. Soil moisture levels in Australia are at their lowest recorded levels and the long term effects of this on our thin, nutrient and mineral poor soils, and therefore our ability to maintain agricultural productivity levels are unknown.

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