



## An emissions trading scheme is futile, writes **Bob Carter**

**N**ATURAL climate changes include warmings, such as the globe experienced in the late 20th century; coolings, such as that occurring since 2002; and more abrupt steps in climate as represented by the Great Pacific Climate Shift in 1977.

Meanwhile, lurking in the background lies the threat of visitation of another Little Ice Age.

The Rudd Government's emissions trading policy deals only with the threat of presumed human-caused warming, and ignores the other all-too-real climate threats. The Government's intended emissions trading scheme, therefore, does not represent proper climate policy but rather constitutes a human global warming policy — which is an entirely different, and speculative, matter.

For the hypothesis that human carbon dioxide emissions are causing dangerous global warming has failed the tests to which it has been subjected. One important test is that global temperature has failed to increase since 1998 despite an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide of almost 5 per cent since then.

So to say that human-caused global warming is proven to be a dangerous problem is untrue, and to introduce policies aimed at stopping presumed warming when cooling is actually

under way is vainglorious. An emissions trading scheme also will represent an expensive act of futility, because its introduction will have no measurable effect on future climate. Even worse, the costs of emissions trading will be levied disproportionately against the members of our society least able to afford them.

Yet everything that we know from the study of past climate change indicates a real climate problem exists, which is the risk of natural climate change, both warmings and the much more dangerous coolings and sudden climatic events.

Study of the geological record reveals many instances of natural climate change of a speed and magnitude that would be hazardous to human life and economic wellbeing should they be revisited upon today's planet.

Rapid temperature switches of several degrees within a few years to a decade have long been known from evidence in ice cores and other ancient climate records.

More modern instrumental data record similarly rapid changes. In Greenland during the 1920s five coastal weather stations sustained average annual temperature rises between 2C and 4C (and by as much as 6C in winter) in under 10 years.

At the same time, human history records many examples of damaging short-term climatic hazards such as storms, floods and droughts. Nearly all these varied climatic events remain unpredictable.

Human influence aside, therefore, it is certain that natural climate change will continue.

In dealing with the certainties and

uncertainties of climate change, the key issue is prudent risk assessment. As for other natural planetary hazards, policies to cope with climate change should be based on adaptation to the change as it happens, and include the provision of financial help for those disadvantaged by the change.

Therefore an appropriate public policy on climate change should, first, monitor changes as they occur and continue to do so; and, second, respond and adapt to any changes in the same way that we deal with other damaging natural events.

New Zealand already has such a national monitoring and response system in place for earthquake, volcanic and flood disasters, linked to a compensation and insurance system.

The certainty is that natural climate change and variation will continue. But like Holland in the past, adapt we must and will.

More research and better policy advice is needed on how best to manage water and agricultural resources, and urban growth, in the context of natural climate changes certain to occur.

Even were generous new funding to be provided towards these ends, the net cost would be orders of magnitude less than will be engendered by introducing a fundamentally misconceived emissions trading scheme.

To boot, contingent damage to the economy, standard of living and world food supply would be avoided.

Does that sound like a good deal, Minister?

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