

# BUSH MAKES U.S.A. A "ROGUE STATE" ON CLIMATE CHANGE.

By Noel Ryan

On July 23 at the World Climate Change Conference in Bonn, 180 countries agreed to sign the Kyoto Protocol by negotiating a deal on some of the unresolved issues from the 1997 conference. The agreement was reached despite G W Bush infamously withdrawing the United States' support.

The Kyoto Protocol is the international community's response to climate change. The heat trapping gas carbon dioxide has increased by 30% since the industrial revolution due to the burning of fossil fuels such as coal and oil and the clearing of forests for agriculture. There is little doubt that this human induced change in the composition of earth's atmosphere will change the earth's climate. Increasing storms, floods, droughts and even rising sea levels are predicted. The poorest people in the poorest countries, those who have not benefited from industrialisation, will suffer the most. The greenhouse effect, or global warming as it is also known, is one of the greatest threats facing the people and biodiversity of this planet.

Global warming is a global problem and requires a global political response. At Kyoto in 1997 the industrialised countries agreed to reduce their greenhouse emissions to 5% below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012. Australia won an 8% increase by being the only significant country which threatened not to sign. However, the recent Bonn agreement addressed many of these outstanding issues while still maintaining some environmental integrity.

The Climate Coalition, backed by big oil and coal interests, had been lobbying against any action on climate change for years. In his book *The Carbon Wars*, former Greenpeace activist Jeremy Leggett

detailed the coalition's long term campaign to undermine the international climate negotiations.

After the signing of the Kyoto Protocol, the fossil fuel industry was aghast.

The US is the world's biggest greenhouse polluter and G W Bush's successful presidential was funded by big oil and big coal interests. They must have been overjoyed when they got a Texas oilman into the White House. However, the US continued to negotiate the Kyoto Protocol. The Bonn meeting was even postponed for two months to allow the US time to prepare. People in the Bush administration were starting to say positive things like they believed that global warming was a real problem.

In March Bush's backers must have told him it was time to kill the Kyoto Protocol. He announced that the US was pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol because it was bad for the US economy and China and India did not have targets. Of course he did not mention that the average American produces 20 times as much greenhouse gases compared to the average Indian.

His advisors told him the Europeans would be relieved Bush had saved them the trouble of scrapping the treaty, and that they could now use the US as a scapegoat. However, Bush was surprised at the strength of the European reaction. He was castigated by many European government ministers and Prime Ministers. Even in the parochial US this was worrying. Europe were angry the US had turned its back on four years of intense negotiations without coming up with an alternative. Climate change became front-page news in the US for the first time.

The agreement at Bonn has isolated the US. Bush's advisors can no longer claim that the rest of world

is not serious about climate change. Bush's officials are contradicting each other in public about the alternative to Kyoto that the US said it would put forward.

The fossil fuel industry seems to be following the path mapped out by the tobacco industry decades earlier. First deny the science, hire your own scientists, and then find doctors who will go on television and say "there is no proof that smoking causes lung cancer". The fossil fuel lobby digs up scientists who will say "rising temperatures are the result of natural variation" and flies them around the world. Such climate scientists are getting harder to find. The tobacco industry successfully delayed action for decades.

The Bonn agreement lets many countries off the hook by allowing them to claim absorption of carbon dioxide by their forests. Something they can claim without actually having to do anything because these forests would have absorbed the Co2 anyway. However, it restricts the use of most of these loopholes. It is likely to limit emissions to around 1990 levels. Without the treaty they would probably have been 20% higher. Countries will have to change their practices if they are to meet the targets. It also creates a framework to set further emissions reduction targets after 2012. Fossil fuels are at the core of the world economy. The Bonn agreement is the first step to finding a way for humankind to live on this planet without dangerously changing the climate.

The US is now a rogue state when it comes to global warming.

## WHAT ABOUT AUSTRALIA?

What has our government done at the international climate conference?

At Kyoto it was obvious that Australia could increase emissions by about 40% if it ended land clearing and planted some trees compared to a decrease for the rest of the industrialised world. In Bonn Australia held on to the gains it obtained at Kyoto. We also ensured there would be no serious financial penalty applied to countries that do not meet their targets. Australian bureaucrats raised the hackles of many by continuing to argue over technicalities on compliance after the agreement had been made. Countries that do not meet their targets under the current agreement have an additional 1/3 added to the repayments they must make in the next target period. Australia attempted to water down even this gentle penalty and so make the treaty completely toothless.

This is a generous deal for Australia. By far, we will be the world's biggest per capita user of fossil fuels during the first commitment period. Australia runs the risk of becoming the world's dinosaur fossil fuel burning economy while other countries turn to energy efficiency and renewable energy.

While this would be convenient for polluters it is no long term solution for the nation as a whole. Eventually Australia will have to give up its reliance on fossil fuels, but by that time the rest of the world will be streets ahead, well on the way to a low pollution economy. If Australia does not reduce its fossil fuel use soon, it will eventually lose the economic advantage it gained at the expense of the environment by negotiating its very lenient target.

The uses of sinks have played a major role in determining Australia's easy target. Sinks involve the



George W. Bush...He cares a lot.

use of the carbon storage potential of forests to alleviate climate change. Environmentalists supported the ending of land clearing. It is the biggest threat to biodiversity and it will also help Australia meet its Kyoto greenhouse target. Australia's temperate and subtropical grassy woodlands are becoming increasingly fragmented and bird species are already going extinct in those fragments. Tree plantations that gain credits are likely to be established on previously cleared farmland so there is likely to be little biodiversity impact from industrial tree farms. They may have impacts on water by drying up rivers, but they may also be valuable in absorbing excess water and therefore would help to alleviate salinity in some areas.

Australia managed to get a special category of "revegetation" included as a sink. Revegetation would cover plantings such as salt bush which do not meet the definition of forest for afforestation. Where the Federal Government says it wanted to finance land degradation, other countries challenge that, arguing Australia wanted to do a lot of land clearing.

Australia says it has given away its rights to use native forests as sinks. This is surprising, however. Perhaps Australia thought that unlike Russia, Canada and Japan we would have to change Australia's logging practices to get a credit because our forests are still being cut unsustainably. The government said it would put out a policy paper on it last year but changed its mind. I think the bureaucracy may have not have wanted outsiders interfering in "their" forests. Now that native forests appear to be excluded by consideration of the treaty, there is nothing to stop the further conversion of native forests to plantations.

Australia could also get carbon credits for agriculture in the Bonn Agreement. A worry for the environment is that this may encourage the conversion of native grassland to improved pasture. In south eastern Australia our native grasslands are becoming very rare.

Australia should now ratify the Kyoto Protocol so the world can start doing something about climate change. Australia is the biggest per capita greenhouse gas polluter in the world. The government should ignore the *coal* in coalition and get behind a treaty that attempts to deal with this dire threat to life by supporting ecosystems across the globe.

**Noel Ryan**  
**Climate Change Researcher**  
**The Wilderness Society**

**I am the new campaigner in the Wollongong Office of the Wilderness Society. If you would like to help the campaign on this or other issues the Wilderness Society is working such as forest destruction and land clearing please me or at the office.**

**(02) 4226 2530**  
**wollongong@wilderness.org.au**

# The Exploitation of a Community

By Olive Rodwell

Human history overflows with examples of the exploitation of one group of people in order to gain wealth and power for another group. The exploitation of the people of Port Kembla today is a glaring example of this, in our enlightened, so called democratic country.

For years residents suffered horrendous pollution from a copper smelter positioned 100 metres from the main street. In the last year of operation of Southern Copper, it exceeded World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines for sulphur dioxide emissions by 4000 times. This equates to more than 10 times a day. Mixed in with the sulphur dioxide were lead, arsenic, cadmium and other toxic substances. No wonder we felt sick.

The heavy metals found their way into the houses and gardens in the township, and lead found its way into the bloodstreams of the children. The Illawarra Child Blood Lead Study in 1994 reported that Port Kembla was a community at risk because of the levels of lead found in the tests taken from small children. The 1993 Study of Metals Content in the Roofs of Houses Around the Port Kembla Industrial Area concluded that for houses located within 1 km of Southern Copper there is "a potential long term environmental health risk to persons inhaling or ingesting the dust." Southern Copper spent \$7 million on remediating the damage done by acid rain to roofs, concrete paths and driveways, and to cars, but there has been no clean up of the roof dust or the contaminated yards.

Residents were told not to disturb the roof dust, but in some homes it seeps in through cracks and vents. The ceilings of two classrooms at St Patrick's School collapsed after heavy rain a couple of years ago. Fortunately the children were on holidays so the toxic load did not affect them.

After incidents of toxic dust blowing over the community and complaints from residents, Wollongong City Council now requires owners to have the dust removed prior to demolition of houses. This is an improvement for the health impact on the community but it is an extra cost to the owner who is also a victim. Other polluted towns such as Boolaroo, Broken Hill and Port Pirie have been remediated. Residents are asking council to seek funds to have the roof dust in some Port Kembla homes removed.

The disregard for the health of the people of Port Kembla continues. In 1997 the State Labor Government passed a law that validated the reopening of the copper smelter and effectively stopped Helen Hamilton's case against the reopening, in the Land and Environment Court. Premier Bob Carr said the revamped smelter would be "State of the Art" and would have the "Strictest Guidelines".

Repeated impacts on dozens of residents have shown that Carr's statement is not true, in fact it is utter nonsense. The State Government is allowing residents to be repeatedly gassed by sulphur dioxide. What other government in Australia permits the legal gassing of its citizens? Port Kembla Copper (PKC) is allowed to exceed WHO guidelines for ten minute emissions of sulphur dioxide of 17.5 pphm up to 75 times a year in the business area and 12 times in the residential area (there is only one monitor in the residential area in Port Kembla). The "never ever to be exceeded" level of 50 pphm has been repeatedly breached. The latest incident was in June this year and that reached 120 pphm. Homes and cars are again being damaged by acid fallout. Children attending St Patrick's School have been kept indoors because of sulphur dioxide fumes. Parents and children were affected at a sporting event at Coomaditchie Lagoon in April this year. Sulphur dioxide fumes have been smelt at the new public school but there is no monitor there to register the level. All these impacts from a plant that is working about 50% of the time and has been shut down for repairs and maintenance on several occasions since the secret start up and stuff up in February 2000. It is presently shut down for three weeks.

The residents have been left to fight multinational companies and an uncaring State Labor Government alone. The unions that usually fight for the rights of the oppressed have ignored the injustice because they want the jobs. The Labor politicians will not speak out because they dare not oppose Bob Carr's wishes.

"We have the right to leave our windows open in the summer, like anyone else" said Helen Hamilton said after her court case was adjourned. The unfair burden of pollution placed on the people of Port Kembla in order to provide jobs for the Illawarra is exploitation at its worst, and a denial of the basic human right to breath clean non toxic air.