

Statement for Senate Hearings

20 May 2009, Parliament House, Canberra

Dr Brett Parris

World Vision Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you again. You've had a long round of hearings already so we appreciate the extra effort you are making.

Since Tim Costello and I appeared at the hearings in Melbourne, Tim has spoken with World Vision's National Directors in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Brazil, South Africa, Ethiopia, India and Indonesia. They told him of the impacts they are already seeing on the ground from climate change – how they are affecting real people. They are seeing monsoons that arrive late or which don't arrive at all; stronger and more destructive cyclones; increased water stress and hunger; the increased migration of rural people to slums in the cities because their farms can no longer support them.

Last week one of the world's top medical journals, *The Lancet*, published a report after a year-long cooperation with University College London, declaring that climate change was the greatest threat to public health of the 21st century.

This is not some abstract debate. It is not, and should not be seen as, another round of the left-right 'culture wars.' Climate change is not a leftist issue – and it is enormously damaging that so many people seem to perceive it as such.

Climate change is a scientific issue. Contrary to the perceptions, the core of the science is not in doubt. All major National Academies of Science – from Australia, the US, UK, Canada, Germany, India, Russia, China, Brazil, Italy, Japan, and so on – all of them have warned that climate change is real and poses a major threat.

Above all climate change is a development issue – we are struggling with the legacy of 200 years of prices not reflecting the true costs of emissions. We now have distorted markets, distorted economies and distorted patterns of development that must be transformed to secure a stable and prosperous future for our children.

We have followed the science closely and the scientists are telling us that we are facing a national emergency, and indeed a global emergency.

The rich countries must drastically reduce emissions and must help poor countries with adaptation and mitigation financing and technology transfer. The major developing country emitters for their

part must reduce emissions below business as usual and in some cases below current per capita levels.

An emergency demands and energetic and decisive response that is appropriate to the scale of the threat – not treating the issue like a normal economic reform that can be put off. Delaying tariff reform, for example, would have had minor economic consequences. Delaying strong action on climate change would mean we miss our one chance to avoid catastrophic damages like the collapse of agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin.

On the CPRS changes, World Vision is ambivalent overall – our main interest is in a strong global deal that is effective in preventing dangerous climate change. And we would point out that 450 CO₂-eq only gives us about a 50% change of keeping warming below 2°C – which is too high anyway to prevent the loss of Arctic sea ice, which would lead to the outgassing of billions of tonnes of carbon from the melting permafrost in the Arctic circle.

We want to reaffirm support for the idea of a cap and trade scheme that can be linked to the international carbon trade. On the changes:

Having the 25% target is terrific. It means that at least Australia won't be a wrecker in the negotiations. But let me start with something that may be important: The IPCC target figures for Annex 1 countries are 25-40% below 1990 levels to meet the 450 ppm CO₂-eq target. The Australian target of 25% below 2000 levels uses the year 2000 as a base – it's actually only 24% below 1990 levels. So we're not quite there yet in terms of getting within the IPCC range. Australia's target should be 26% below 2000 levels to be 25% below 1990 levels.

On the conditions, these include:

- Comprehensive coverage of gases, sources, and REDD – so including the forestry and land use.
- The trajectory of all economies' commitments should be consistent with 450 ppm CO₂-eq or lower
- The advanced economies should in aggregate be at least 25% below 1990 levels by 2020. (So the 1990 base year is used here. Note that Australia is requiring making its commitment conditional on the rich countries reaching at least 25% below 1990 when its own commitment is only 24%).
- Demands on the major developing countries – and here the government is referring to the non-Annex 1 members of the Major Economies Forum: China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico and South Africa:
 - 20% below business as usual by 2020 collectively
 - Financial resources *from* these countries – not *to* them but *from* them.

Then there is a Ratification Review that is in addition to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties to assess whether the final deal meets these conditions. This implies that the government would need to be confident of passing this hurdle before signing an agreement.

We recognize the need for Australia to declare strong targets as soon as possible to give the negotiations momentum. Our concern with having the 24% below 1990 target, and strict conditions attached to it, enshrined in legislation, is that this may reduce Australia's flexibility in the negotiations, and that reduction in flexibility could hinder a global deal.

But as I said, our main concern is for a strong global deal and decisive action is urgent. We're not privy to those negotiations so if passing the CPRS would truly help to get a strong global deal we support it. But to the extent that the conditions on developing countries make it harder to get a strong deal, the conditions worry us.

On other aspects of the changes:

- The 5% unilateral target is still far too low
- The delay of one year and the \$10 permits for the first year are concerning – both delay the essential transformation of the Australian economy.

We were also asked last time about other countries' actions, so let me briefly outline what's going on elsewhere:

- The UK now has its 2008 Climate Change Act which requires carbon budgets. In his April speech the Chancellor said that the target of 34% below 1990 by 2020 was "legally binding". They also have a provision that no new coal fired power stations are to be built without carbon capture and storage technology. The UK's Climate Change Committee also recommended 42% by 2020 in the context of a global deal so that target is also possible.
- In Canada, Bill C-311, the 'Climate Change Accountability Act' passed its second reading in the House of Commons, with a third reading soon. The targets there are 25% below 1990 by 2020 and 80% below 1990 by 2050.
- In the US, the Waxman-Markey bill 'The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009' requires 15% renewable by 2020 and emissions reductions of 17% below 2005 by 2020 in the context of a cap and trade scheme.
- The EU has its 20% below 1990 by 2020 unilateral target with 30% possible as part of a global deal.