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1. Cancun repairs dialogue

Adam Morton

December 13, 2010

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/cancun-repairs-dialogue-20101212-18u15.html>

Amid all the hot air, the most telling noise echoing from delegates at the **Cancun climate talks** at the weekend was a collective sigh of relief.

As one commentator observed, the climate will not be saved by what was agreed in Mexico, but the United Nations negotiations have been.

After the **bitter acrimony** of the Copenhagen conference, it is a modest result that exceeds what many involved had expected.

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Many of the big questions remain unaddressed, but the talks ended on a rare note of goodwill between the developed and developing world.

The only holdout was Bolivia, which protested into the final hours that based on the science the Cancun agreements would "put more humans in near-death situations". Mexican Foreign Secretary Patricia Espinosa ruled that one country did not have veto power and gavelled the agreement into UN existence regardless.

What does the Cancun deal mean?

Greg Combet helped build agreement for a climate fund to help the most disadvantaged countries. A board will be selected, with the World Bank to initially act as trustee as it works out how to raise \$US100 billion a year. Bread was broken on a contentious scheme to verify and measure national emissions, one of the big sticking points at Copenhagen. And there was agreement on a deal to reduce emissions from tropical rainforest logging.

For the first time, major developing countries including China and India submitted to the UN targets to slow emissions growth.

It means the nations responsible for more than 80 per cent of emissions have made non-binding pledges - a necessary step on the road to a comprehensive pact.

The heavy lifting, though, is still to come. Current targets are nothing like what is expected, yet the Obama administration - which will be expected to do much more - has its hands tied by a Republican-dominated Congress.

Developing nations want the wealthy to extend the Kyoto Protocol before they consider a binding deal. Japan, Russia and Canada refuse. China says it won't be bound, regardless.

And rearing its head again is the "truth in targets" fight over the creative carbon accounting that is allowing Australia to meet its Kyoto goal by claiming large offsets for stopping forest clearing.

In March, Europe will decide whether to lift its 2020 target to a 30 per cent cut in emissions, and China is expected to announce an emissions trading scheme. If both happen, hopes will be raised that something more meaningful might be possible in South Africa next December. Don't expect Copenhagen-style hype though - these days, expectations are being kept as low as possible.

Adam Morton is Age environment reporter.

2. Going in circles on climate change

Ramesh Thakur

From: The Australian December 14, 2010 12:00AM 1 comment

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/going-in-circles-on-climate-change/story-e6frq6zo-1225970471092>

KEY decisions must be made at national level.

FIFTEEN-THOUSAND delegates descended on Cancun, conferred and left with a faux agreement that will not save the climate but rescued the negotiating process.

That we should be relieved is testament to the soft bigotry of low expectations on what once was billed as the greatest moral challenge of our time.

The once-dominant global warming lobby is reduced to the sorry spectacle of gathering rosebuds of consolation.

Britain's Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Chris Huhne, described it as a "turning point".

Added to the turning points of Kyoto, Bali and Copenhagen, the world is going round in circles.

The science of climate change is robust enough to have withstood a year of searching scrutiny by ideological, self-serving and open-minded sceptics alike. But agreement on the science does not compute into agreement on policy nor trump the politics of climate change and global warming.

Policymakers must make choices and establish priorities among many competing demands. They must examine the issues, the resources needed to tackle problems, time scales involved, opportunity costs of alternative resource allocation, and the diminishing versus increasing returns of allocating resources to different problems.

This is true of different goals: climate change, education, health, growth, poverty eradication, energy and national security, and so on. It is also true of alternative strategies for tackling an agreed goal, including climate change.

What is the best mix of adaptation and mitigation? Should there be voluntary guidelines or binding emission targets, and if so, uniformly for all countries or variable targets for different groups?

How generous should industrialised countries be on technology and financial transfers to developing countries? How do we choose between cap and trade, an emissions trading scheme, carbon capture and sequestration? Between investing in cleaner technology for existing fuel sources versus alternative, renewable clean and green fuels or nuclear power?

Even among those agreed on the science, there are policy differences. The benefits of action now will not flow through for some time. Owing to emissions already released, the climate will continue to heat for several decades.

Of the mix of known and unpredictable risks, immediate versus later consequences, time scales, resources required, and costs and benefits, one could argue that greater and earlier gains at less pain will result from focusing on nuclear abolition as a higher priority.

That takes us into the politics - domestic and global - of climate change. The US system, in

particular, leaves the process open to capture by a determined minority of spoilers and rejectionists.

Current US politics seems especially dysfunctional for making long-term strategic decisions in the public interest against vested interests with deep pockets.

Politicians the world over prefer gain now and pain later - for their successors in office.

Climate change requires them to reverse that equation.

The global politics is even more complicated. Can the Chinese and Indian governments persuade citizens to accept permanently lower lifestyles compared with Westerners? Can Western governments convince citizens to accept substantial cuts in living standards without developing countries agreeing to binding emission cuts?

The key decisions affecting climate change will be made not by the UN but by governments, not at international conferences but in national capitals, and not by the environment but the finance ministers of China and India.

Western countries refuse to acknowledge culpability for failures to honour Kyoto and Bali pledges, instead pointing a collective finger at developing countries' rejection of binding emission cuts.

The latter blame the crisis on the West's past industrialisation. Westerners highlight present and future growth in energy consumption by China and India as the main factors taking us to, and beyond, the tipping point.

Developed countries talk of net national emissions, developing countries of per capita emissions. All are equally constrained by domestic growth requirements and political compulsions.

The problem of global warming was created by developed countries, which have larger carbon footprints and greater financial and technological capabilities for mitigation and adaptation. An American emits 15 times as much CO₂ as an Indian, but the impacts of climate change will not be distributed in proportion to those responsible for global warming.

Ramesh Thakur is professor of political science at the University of Waterloo and adjunct professor in the Institute of Ethics, Governance and Law, at Griffith University. He is the author, with Thomas Weiss, of Global Governance and the UN: An Unfinished Journey

3. Cancun marks a turning point

Julian Hunt

From: [The Australian](#) December 14, 2010 12:00AM 29 comments

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/cancun-marks-a-turning-point/story-e6frg6zo-1225970529189>

THE greenhouse horse has bolted so it's now time for climate-change adaptation.

FAR from being another unsuccessful international meeting, as some predicted, the Cancun Summit is likely to be looked back upon in years to come as a seminal moment.

The accord, reached on Saturday, endorsed the various actions of countries to limit greenhouse gas emissions. However, more significantly for the long term it accepted that preserving the global environment in its present state is probably unattainable.

The focus thus now moves to adaptation to deal with the more volatile climate that is predicted by all the main centres of climate science for the rest of this century and beyond.

The exceptional seriousness of the warming problem was underlined most recently by an International Energy Agency report last month on the trend of increasing global emissions of greenhouse gases. Under the Copenhagen Accord's environmental goals and pledges (as at the end of November), emissions will rise 21 per cent above 2008 levels by 2035 alone; the emissions growth rate of China (now the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases) will increase at an even greater rate.

The IEA says the increase in global temperature in these circumstances will be at least 3.5C. There appears little that the incremental, non-legally binding Cancun accord (which builds upon Copenhagen) will do to alter this. Indeed, opposition to the deal has centred around the fact that critics, including Bolivia, assert that it would result in a global temperature rise of more than 4C.

In the absence of moves towards a much stronger, global and legally binding deal, the world is thus on the path of the "business as usual" scenario envisaged recently as an unlikely worst case. And, the international community now must therefore consider unprecedented changes.

What is absolutely clear is that temperature rises of a 3C to 4C magnitude will, most likely, pose an irreversible tipping point for continental-sized areas of changing land cover, and for ice on sea and land. Millions (if not tens of millions) of people are likely to be displaced by the effects of desertification and rising sea levels, and mountain snow melt.

In this fast moving and disturbing picture, international action must now focus with equal urgency on how societies can adapt to (as well as prevent) these changes. And, with this in mind, politicians and the public would do well to follow the Netherlands Delta commission; the report of the British Adaptation Sub-Committee of the Committee on Climate Change; and China's scientific agencies, and seriously begin to consider planning for the monumental changes that will be apparent in the decades to come.

Put simply, as extreme weather becomes more frequent, countries will need to develop integrated practical policies that deal both with the full range of climate change adaptation and natural disasters.

This year's weather-related disasters, ranging from the brush fires in Russia to the floods in Pakistan, will only grow in frequency and we must be better prepared.

In this difficult context, how is the world responding?

First, although the Kyoto accord will not be renewed in 2012, the (weaker and non-legally binding) Cancun deal that more than 190 countries have signed up to is nonetheless an important development. Key measures include a green climate fund intended to raise and disburse \$100 billion a year by 2020 to protect poor nations against climate impacts and assist them with low-carbon development; and a new adaptation committee will support countries as they establish climate-protection plans.

While the Cancun accord has its weaknesses, it is much better than no deal at all. And we must be realistic: given the massively wide range of political, economic and technical approaches to climate-change policy across the world, it may now be impossible to frame a much stronger international agreement that would satisfy governments, businesses and civil society groups.

The second key trend is the development across the world of a wide diversity of approaches to tackling climate change at the local, regional and national levels.

In a Mexico City symposium, organised by Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment (Globe), I heard earlier this month how collaboration in such "bottom up" initiatives will be an essential part of the global effort to tackle the dangers of climate change, and should be part of the Cancun accord.

For instance, in China, where a feasibility study is being concluded into a new comprehensive climate change law, financial rewards for reducing energy use provided by regional government are making substantial improvements in efficiency. These arrangements are evolving into local carbon markets, albeit small-scale and voluntary at this stage.

European Union countries have been emphasising different kinds of low carbon energy, such as wind, carbon sequestration and nuclear power. The continent has also promoted its policy of carbon trading to motivate industrial efficiency. The EU and China are also planning to introduce new systems of monitoring greenhouse gas emissions, using remote sensing and ground-based instrumentation, in order to have a reliable regulatory-incentivisation scheme.

Other countries are focusing on preventing the rise of atmospheric greenhouse gases by expanding forestry. For instance, Brazil and Mexico are introducing national legislation for minimising the loss of tropical rainforest and preserving these irreplaceable natural habitats, while ensuring the vitality of communities who live in them.

Modern technologies including satellite surveillance are ensuring that loss of rainforest can be slowed.

However, despite these initiatives, we are now at a point at which preserving our current environment is probably unobtainable. What is thus urgently needed is broader agreement on a range of practical actions to mitigate climate change and deal with its effects on health, business, agriculture and natural disasters.

The rising costs of dealing with these effects, such as coastal defences, reducing desertification and urban overheating, mean that preventative actions have to begin right away. It would be folly of the highest order to delay this process until economies grow further, as some influential economists continue to argue.

Julian Hunt is a visiting professor at Delft University, vice-president of Globe, and former director-general of Britain's Met Office.

4. Political interference will cripple climate debate

Michael Asten

From: *The Australian* December 17, 2010 12:00AM 45 comments

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/political-interference-will-cripple-climate-debate/story-e6frg6zo-1225972366783>

THE Gillard government must not repeat the errors committed when Rudd was PM.

THE Cancun climate change conference has come and gone. As expected, it began with a statement from climate scientists on the magnitude of the threat: a predicted sea-level rise of 0.5m to 2m by 2100.

Australia's Climate Change Minister Greg Combet spoke of Australia's commitment to spend \$599 million on regional adaptation programs on climate change for poor countries. This may be a wise move since, based on the conference outcomes, few could be optimistic that the global community would succeed in reversing climate change by agreement on decreasing carbon emissions.

Less wise are the Gillard government's promises to introduce a price on Australian carbon emissions next year; we are entitled to ask first whether the government has learned from past mistakes, in particular its failure to countenance and consider a breadth of points of view on which mechanism, and indeed which scientific prediction we should believe.

The recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report, which advocates putting a price on carbon, is notable in its absence of endorsement of Kevin Rudd's emissions trading scheme over a carbon tax or vice versa.

The preferred mechanism for a price on carbon was a matter of some debate - and bureaucratic abuse of process - last year when Clive Spash, then of the CSIRO, wrote a journal article advocating a response to climate change via changes in economic structure, institutions and behaviour, rather than by the introduction of an ETS.

The Spash paper should have been welcomed as an example of the CSIRO fulfilling its six-point charter, which includes agreement for open communication, encouragement of debate on research issues of public interest, the contestability of ideas and demonstration of independence and integrity. Unfortunately, the CSIRO failed both its employee and its employer (the nation). The author was subject to intense pressure from his employer to modify his conclusions after they had been accepted by external peer review, to align them with the policy of the government of the

day.

In what will be seen by historians as an outstanding example of political interference in the academic process, Spash resisted the demands for alteration, had his professional reputation traduced by ill-considered claims by Science Minister Kim Carr and eventually resigned his position.

His paper appeared this year in the June issue of the journal *New Political Economy*, and it is relevant to the present debate in that it questions the cost-effectiveness of an ETS and warns of the "potential for manipulation to achieve financial gain while showing little regard for environmental or social consequences".

A particular irony of this case is that Spash accepts the scientific evidence for anthropogenic global warming but differed from the 2009 government views on the nature of economic management of such change. Spash now holds a professorial position in Norway, and his work has renewed credibility as the OECD and our parliament consider options for a carbon-pricing alternative or some other mechanism for managing climate change.

Has the government learned from its mistakes of last year? Probably not. The supposedly multi-party Climate Change Committee set up by Combet includes a proviso that members must commit to a carbon price; the opposition has understandably declined to participate under such loaded terms of reference.

I also fear that the quality of scientific advice to the government is likewise loaded so that ongoing studies on scientific parameters vital to the climate debate such as the magnitude of the CO₂ and water vapour-related feedbacks in atmospheric warming, the role of solar-magnetic and cosmic influences on climate, and the geological-historical records of cyclic climate change are starved of funding in Australia relative to the munificence of grants available for Combet's regional adaptation programs, or various green energy projects.

And if scientists involved in the foregoing topics arrive at a conclusion inconvenient to government policy, Spash's experience gives us no confidence that they will receive a fair hearing.

Political interference against scientific objectivity is insidious and may ultimately deliver hideous outcomes. It is common in climate change debate for lesser intellects to label those who dare to question present climate science orthodoxy as deniers, making the implicit association between climate sceptics and Holocaust deniers.

Such accusers probably are unaware of the savage irony in this epithet, in that German academics and scientists compliant with government policy were intimately involved in the formulation and development of Nazi racial policy, and, as historians have commented, the Nazi regime brought boom-time conditions for scientists from racial anthropologists, biologists and economists who were able to contribute to this aspect of the regime's policies. Those academics who were outspoken were removed by the Gestapo.

I do not offer these thoughts as being analogous to present climate debate but by way of caution to politicians who may be unwilling to allow debate, and scientists who may be unduly influenced by funding sources.

As a geophysicist my reading and writing leads me to question the level of influence of human-related CO₂ emissions on present versus past climate change, and it is of huge concern to our nation's future if we commit to a price on carbon without a parallel high-priority, objective and ongoing scientific effort to quantify uncertainties and natural factors also affecting climate change.

The Cancun predictions on sea-level rises contrast with recent satellite observations on the rate of sea-level change and provide a timely example on the need for scientific objectivity.

A recent peer-reviewed paper by Svetlana Jevrejeva from Britain's National Oceanography Centre, Liverpool, provides a calculation of 0.6m-1.6m by 2100 using a range of climate models. However, these models also show predicted sea-level change rates of 4.2mm-5.4mm a year for

the first decade of the 21st century.

I contrast these predictions with just published observations by Riccardo Riva from Delft in The Netherlands and international colleagues who use satellite technology to measure actual global sea level rise in this same decade to be in the order of 1mm a year, which happens to be about the rate of sea-level increase that has been observed during the past century. In other words, the observational data suggests the problem as modelled may be overstated by a factor of five.

Did scientists from the no-longer independent CSIRO (or other competent body in Australia) brief minister Combet and his team at Cancun on this discrepancy and its implications? Are they permitted to make such comment publicly? And how will such observations affect the targeting of our funds on offer for regional adaptation programs?

Until we have confidence scientists can address such issues without censorship or denigration, we cannot have confidence that a price on carbon will be scientifically justified or wisely spent.

Michael Asten is a professorial fellow in the school of geosciences, Monash University.

5. Threat to polar bear put on ice

From: The Times December 17, 2010 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/threat-to-polar-bear-put-on-ice/story-e6frg6so-1225972361601>

THE risk of polar bears becoming extinct may have been overstated.

Research suggests that Arctic sea ice will melt more gradually than previously estimated.

The new projections suggest that if carbon emissions are curbed quickly, enough ice is likely to remain to sustain the current population of polar bears during the next century.

Previously it was believed that once temperatures rose beyond a certain point, the retreat of Arctic ice would become unstoppable even if global temperatures subsequently stabilised. Under this projection, about two-thirds of the world's 22,000 polar bears were predicted to have been lost by mid-century.

The latest simulations, published in the journal Nature, suggest that instead a linear, and reversible, decline in ice is more likely. If carbon emissions drop during the next two decades, the bears' habitat could be preserved.

"What we projected in 2007 was based on the usual greenhouse gas scenario," said Steven Amstrup, an emeritus researcher with the US Geological Survey and a senior scientist with Polar Bears International. "That was a dire outlook, but it didn't consider the possibility of greenhouse gas mitigation."

Other scientists felt the new projections were too optimistic. "I wouldn't say we can rule out a tipping point, but it does show a tipping point isn't inevitable," said Walt Meier, a senior scientist at the National Snow and Ice Data Centre in Boulder, Colorado.

The Times

6. Anna Bligh opens door to nuclear power

EXCLUSIVE: Jamie Walker and Imre Salusinszky

From: [The Australian](#) December 24, 2010 12:00AM 88 comments

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/anna-bligh-opens-door-to-nuclear-power/story-fn59niix-1225975663810>

ANNA Bligh has backed calls for the Labor Party to review its policy on nuclear power.

The Queensland Premier has warned that renewable sources cannot meet the surging demand for baseload electricity.

Ms Bligh and ALP national president said development of the only other viable alternative energy, hydro-electricity, had been hamstrung by resistance to new dams.

Ms Bligh said pointedly that "parts of the environment movement" had shifted on the nuclear option, and now supported it as an abatement measure for climate change.

Ms Bligh's comments to The Australian reflect an important shift on nuclear power among Labor leaders, who now cite cost and perception issues rather than philosophical considerations as the impediment to introducing nuclear energy.

She joins senior Labor figures including federal Resources Minister Martin Ferguson, right-wing Australian Workers Union leader Paul Howes, former NSW premier Bob Carr and Labor senators Steve Hutchins and Mark Bishop in supporting a review of the ALP's long-standing ban on nuclear power, most likely at the party's national conference next December

The conference is already set to become a political battleground over gay marriage.

In an interview with The Australian, Ms Bligh said the national conference was "where these debates should happen. We shouldn't be frightened of them."

The office of NSW Premier Kristina Keneally said yesterday she was "open to a public debate" on nuclear energy.

"As the Prime Minister has indicated previously, the Labor Party has had a longstanding policy of opposition to nuclear power," Ms Keneally's spokesperson said. "National conference has always been the place to debate changes to our national party policy.

"Any change to Labor's long-stated policy against nuclear power would have to consider a range of issues, including safety and cost."

The senior Labor Premier, Mike Rann, is heavily invested in expanding uranium mining in South Australia but his spokesman said he would not comment on whether nuclear power should be on the agenda at the national conference, which has been brought forward from 2012.

The Australian understands Labor's NSW division has decided to bring its state conference forward from its usual date in October to July, partly to frame its position on nuclear power.

A NSW Labor source said the move was to allow issues such as nuclear power and gay marriage to be thrashed out in advance of the national conference.

By bringing the national conference forward, Labor is trying to avoid having internal policy brawling drag into the election year of 2013.

Ms Bligh said the nation was entering "an environment where people are questioning coal-fired power". With a carbon tax back on the agenda, and Julia Gillard nominating 2011 as a year of decision and delivery on climate change, among other issues, Ms Bligh said it was "perfectly understandable" for nuclear power to be in the frame.

The Prime Minister, however, has played down the push within Labor ranks for a nuclear review.

The government's chief scientist, Penny Sackett, said this month that nuclear power should be considered as part of a suite of options aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Her comments came as a report by the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering found that nuclear, combined-cycle gas turbine and wind power would provide the cheapest low-carbon electricity, and were the most worthy of investment.

Ms Bligh said energy was "one of the big policy challenges for the nation" and a carbon tax "will be part of that".

"We have . . . set ourselves renewable energy targets that almost by definition are going to be more expensive than our traditional forms of energy, and there's going to be a limit to the public appetite for that . . . So what are the alternatives?" the Queensland Premier said.

"And . . . people are, you know, increasingly loath to consider hydro-electric power because they

don't want dams."

Ms Bligh said other renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, could not produce sufficient baseload power. "I think it is perfectly understandable why nuclear comes on to the agenda . . . as people are genuinely looking for what is a cleaner alternative," she told *The Australian*.

"And I think it is quite interesting that's now coming as much from some parts -- not all, but some parts -- of the environmental movement, as it is from other parts of the energy sector.

"As we move towards a carbon tax, then that price differential might well start to play out differently."

However, Ms Bligh cautioned that any discussion about nuclear power for Australia remained theoretical, and not just because the cost was "prohibitive".

"I don't know of any suburb that would want it," she said.

"I think there are still very genuinely held concerns about safety, and in an environment . . . where we have other alternatives then I think the prospect of one (a nuclear power plant) in an Australian context in the near future is very slim."

Ms Bligh affirmed that she had no plans to relax Queensland's ban on uranium mining, even though it is now allowed in South Australia and Western Australia, as well as the Northern Territory.

Although Queensland allows uranium exploration, Ms Bligh said she would not take up the mining issue during the term of the current parliament.

"It's not something on my agenda for the next election . . . it's the sort of thing, frankly, I don't have any intention of revisiting."

Additional reporting: Michael Owen

7, Uranium industry claims nuclear attitudes are changing

Andrew Fraser

From: *The Australian* December 27, 2010 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/uranium-industry-claims-nuclear-attitudes-are-changing/story-fn59niix-1225976464182>

THE uranium industry says opinion about nuclear power is moving in its favour as difficulties with alternative power sources mount.

The Australian Uranium Association welcomed the call by Queensland Premier and Labor national president Anna Bligh for a debate on nuclear power at the ALP National Convention to be held at the end of next year.

But anti-nuclear campaigners say the industry's claim that nuclear power can help address climate change problems is a cover for trying to increase exports.

AUA chief executive Michael Angwin said yesterday Ms Bligh's statement, reported in *The Australian* on Thursday, that renewable energy sources could not provide base-load power, was significant.

He said Queensland had last week faced up to problems with its major clean-coal project ZeroGen, while Queensland, along with NSW, had also had to address blowouts in its solar-energy program.

"She's identified what's happening and that solutions such as clean coal and solar energy are at best problematic," he said.

"There is a big change now in people's public attitudes towards the nuclear industry. A few years ago, the entire debate was about uranium mining; now we're finding more people want

information about the broader industry and the role it can play in addressing climate change.

"If you look at issues such as waste, a few years ago the only debate was defiant statements of opposition, but now we find people want to know more about what's being done overseas and what can be done here in Australia."

Within Australia, climate change advocates such as Barry Brook, of the University of South Australia, argue that nuclear energy should be included in a suite of energy solutions to climate change.

But Australia's main environmental groups have signed a statement declaring nuclear power was unsafe, as there was not yet sufficient safeguards to dispose of waste safely while the industry was not commercially feasible and would require large public subsidies.

The Australian Conservation Foundation is agreeable to the matter being discussed at the ALP's conference but says there should be an open debate, not one where factions decided the matter behind closed doors.

He said there may be some support for the idea of a nuclear industry but such support evaporated when a nuclear plant was proposed at a specific location.

"There won't be a nuclear industry in Australia because of this - what this debate is about now is allowing Australian uranium to be exported."

Uranium mining is allowed in South Australia, the Liberal government in Western Australia is keen to develop the industry there, while the Queensland Labor government remains opposed to the industry.

8. Cancun deal puts climate action back on track

Connie Hedegaard

From: The Australian December 27, 2010 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/cancun-deal-puts-climate-action-back-on-track/story-e6frg6zo-1225976418201>

THERE is good reason to reflect for a moment about global warming and the recent climate conference in Cancun.

This year was actually one of the hottest on record. And the weather-related catastrophes, from fires in Moscow to floods in Pakistan and Venezuela, are a warning of things to come unless we deal with the challenge of climate change. That's why the package of decisions that came out of the conference in Cancun may well be this year's most important Christmas present.

What's in the package? Quite a bit. The key points of the agreement concluded in Cancun are based on the results we achieved in Copenhagen last year.

That includes the 2C target and the reduction pledges that countries took on in the run-up to Copenhagen. It includes the commitment of developed nations to provide finance for developing countries: \$US30 billion in the short term (2010-12) and \$US100bn annually by 2020. In this regard, I am very much aware of and welcome the contribution made by Australian minister Greg Combet and his Bangladeshi counterpart in facilitating the political discussions on climate change finance. The package also includes agreement on the rules for transparency -- how countries measure and report their emissions -- which had proved to be a stumbling block in Copenhagen.

In Cancun, all that was agreed in Copenhagen was incorporated into the UN process. But Cancun also took new steps.

Besides tightened rules on transparency, the agreement contains detailed decisions for improved co-operation on technology between north and south, an agreement on climate adaptation in developing countries and a mechanism to reverse deforestation in the tropics.

Cancun did not solve everything. The reduction commitments are not enough to keep

the temperature increase below 2C and there are other outstanding issues, such as the legal form of the agreement and how to provide the long-term finance.

But Cancun proved the multilateral process can deliver results. Without an agreement the UN process would have been in imminent danger. Politicians and the public might well have lost faith in the process and discarded it, with nothing to put in its place.

Now we have a deal. But there is still much work ahead of us, both internationally, where we must still deal with the outstanding issues, and domestically, where we have to deliver on what has been decided. In Europe we are already working on it.

Next year we will present a road map for how we can create an intelligent, innovative low-carbon economy by 2050. We do this for the environment, but we also do it for the sake of competitiveness and energy security.

In a world with ever more people and fewer fossil energy resources, the winners will be the ones who are independent of oscillating oil prices and who can provide energy efficient and innovative solutions. I look forward to working with Combet on these important global issues as part of the developing EU-Australia bilateral relationship.

Connie Hedegaard is European Commissioner for Climate Action.

9. Too busy watching the climate

From: The Australian December 29, 2010 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/too-busy-watching-the-climate/story-e6frq6n6-1225977435091>

BROILING in Perth, floods in Queensland, snow and ice in the northern hemisphere. It must be Christmas.

Indeed, the only real surprise is why we are so surprised. The weather we have seen in the past few days may be extreme, but this is a matter of degree, not of kind. In other words, we have experienced these patterns before. But as airports closed or ground down around Britain and the US, transport routes became gridlocked and thousands of people spent days trying to get to their holiday destinations, it became clear that too many people have been so busy worrying about climate change that they have taken their eyes off the weather. Ditto for Australia, where there has been so much rain in some areas this past month that it threatens to turn our desalination plants into expensive white elephants rather than, as some would claim, the only option for a drought-stricken land.

Failure to watch the weather as well as the climate has arguably led to loss of life and injury that might have been avoided if authorities had spread grit on British roads as well as spreading the word about global warming. International airlines, so busy selling carbon offsets for global miles, might have been better employed ensuring that Heathrow bought a few more snow ploughs. The tendency to see the wood and not the trees was illustrated last month as ABC TV's Lateline interviewed Rear Admiral Neil Morisetti, the British special envoy on climate and energy security. While he was busy in Canberra talking about the long-term impact of climate change on national security, back in Britain the weather threat from cold and snow was looming as a real and present danger.

None of this is to deny climate change or the need to pay attention to its repercussions, but the lack of preparation in the face of London's blizzards, for example, suggests a need to work on present realities, not just future scenarios. While 21st-century men and women often have excessive expectations about the extent to which they can control their environment -- even naturally occurring events such as blizzards and floods -- it is plain that more planning and better infrastructure could have mitigated some of the more appalling incidents across Europe in recent days.

But the events underline what several respected scientific bodies have made clear this year: that

there is still a deal of uncertainty about climate change and in how it will manifest in specific locations. In a recent report, *The Science of Climate Change: Questions and Answers*, the Australian Academy of Science says that "how climate change will affect individual regions is very hard to project in detail, particularly future changes in rainfall patterns, and such projections are highly uncertain."

Like the recent Royal Academy of Science report, the AAS document offers a measured commentary on the science of climate change after a period when politicians and advocates used science to present a false certainty about the extent and causes of global warming. This year marked the end of certainty for science, or more correctly perhaps, the world is rediscovering that, as the AAS says, "No scientific conclusion can ever be absolutely certain". Predicting the weather is as fraught for meteorologists as predicting climate change is for scientists, but a healthy level of uncertainty is a useful antidote to the complacency that helped ruin Christmas for so many.

10. Doctors' obligation to patient before planet

Michael Keane

From: *The Australian* December 28, 2010 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/doctors-obligation-to-patient-before-planet/story-e6frg6zo-1225976795292>

MEDICINE and science connote objectivity and the public may innocently assume contributions from the medical profession are dispassionate facts that lack political and ideological intrusion.

However, the medical profession, like every other human endeavour, operates within the realm of the human condition. In this context it is wholly expected there will be a natural tendency for the opinion and political agendas of doctors to be communicated as if they were based on science and research.

To coincide with the recent climate change meeting in Cancun, Mexico, *The Lancet* medical journal is promoting the Climate and Health Council, "established to enable health professionals around the world to take personal and collective action against the causes of climate change, and to insist that global health is central in climate change negotiations".

Implicit is an appeal that based on "evidence" and research doctors have an obligation, if not moral duty, to support, among various actions, carbon emission reduction strategies. However, is it ethical for doctors to be promoting such strategies under the guise of public health? The strategies to reduce carbon emissions must, necessarily, force some people to adopt behaviour against their will for the benefit of others.

This defines an ethical dilemma, trading the welfare of present versus future generations. In modern ethics the principle of autonomy reigns supreme. However, autonomy is legitimately overruled when there is a compelling argument under the ethical principle of justice. Is there a compelling case?

Many, including *The Lancet*, still unquestionably reference Britain's Stern review to justify the benefits of action now, despite significant controversy over the review's extraordinarily pessimistic assumptions. To be sure, within economist Nicholas Stern's review the supposed health effects have been factored into the costs of global warming along with non-market factors.

Yet many economists, including Indur Goklany, demonstrate that even if we were to accept Stern's questionable assumptions, tomorrow's generations will still be far better off than we are today, even if we do nothing about global warming. For instance, inaction on climate change will mean those living 100 years from now will be only three to 7.5 times better off than we are today, instead of 3.2 to eight times. If we do nothing, descendants of those living in the present developing world will be only 10 to 60 instead of 11 to 65 times better off.

The developing world is where children still die for want of food, millions of women will leak faeces and urine for the rest of their lives for want of basic medical care at birth and where millions die from easily preventable diseases that are almost unheard of in developed countries. There exists the real potential that many in the developing world will be sacrificed on the altar of politically correct ideology. In even the most pessimistic analysis, the potential health effects of climate change are dwarfed by those caused by lack of economic development.

Furthermore, is it ethical to justify action now to protect the welfare of future generations based on the following preposterous assumptions? Zero technological advances; future generations will make no attempt to adapt to climate change; no ways to better people's lives will be discovered including no cures for cancer and chronic diseases and no development of social institutions to foster peace and freedom; and Stern's use of a near zero discount rate which many incorrectly believe represents ethical parity between generations but in fact values those in the future more than those now.

Common sense dictates that there is a relationship between the degree to which a system is complex and the opportunity for ideology to influence the reporting of the science.

In clinical medicine debate can rage for decades over the effect of a single drug used in a single situation. Despite the fact trials can be done and empiric data collected, there are always factors and elements that can be disputed. Consider, then, the difficulty in trying to predict the health effects of changing climates hundreds of years down the track in a world in which we cannot fathom the available technology and economic development.

In this context, to whatever the degree the climate science is "settled", the evidence now available to analyse the health effects of climate change is contemptuously feeble.

Many of the supposed health consequences such as food and water scarcity, infectious diseases and exposure to heat relate to the developing world and are easily remedied by measures already available to those in developed nations.

Much of that evidence conforms to anti-West ideology that ignores the elephant in the room concerning economic development. Much of the data relating to the potential effects on the developed world is already obsolete subsequent to the implementation of simple public health measures. Overall, is the health of those in the developed world severely worse than that of our ancestors 150 years ago because the world has warmed 1.5 degrees?

The Chaser would do well to set up a stall in the Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows and ask people on the street to reduce their economic welfare so those in Toorak can avoid the catastrophe of being a mere 10 times better off than Broadmeadows residents instead of 10.5 times.

If we're considering such an important issue as people's health why do we rely on the analyses of single, politically appointed economists with no significant history in climate economics such as Stern and Ross Garnaut? A group of economists seasoned in many aspects of climate change economics (Copenhagen Consensus) have performed a far more compelling analysis that places carbon reduction as one the most inefficient ways to improve health and welfare.

Revealingly, the CHC declares on its "about" page: "Thirty years ago, health professionals from the USA and the former Soviet Union crossed borders to found the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War movement, an international body of health professionals dedicated to action against nuclear war. Today we will initiate an equally global movement of health professionals to tackle climate change." (There is nothing wrong with the prevention of nuclear war; it is a noble goal, but it is not related to the health effects of global warming.)

In summary, it is legitimate to hold a political opinion regarding action on global warming. But from a public health perspective it would be equally valid to argue for as many coal-fired power plants to be built in Africa, India and China as is humanly possible.

Michael Keane is a bioethicist, consultant anaesthetist and lecturer in public health.

11. Global weather disasters a sign the heat is on

Mike Steketee

From: The Australian January 08, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/global-weather-disasters-a-sign-the-heat-is-on/story-e6frg6zo-1225983256858>

NOW for the good news: Australia has just had its coolest year since 2001, with a mean temperature in 2010 of 22C.

You probably already had guessed something like that was going on and it may have eased your concerns about global warming. Perhaps it even made you more inclined to the view of geologist and paleontologist Bob Carter that it is "the greatest self-organised scientific and political conspiracy that the world has ever seen"?

If only. Being duped is preferable to being fried. Unfortunately, it is hard to find such comfort from the data.. But then perhaps that is because it has been collected by the alleged co-conspirators.

The Bureau of Meteorology said this week the 2010 mean temperature was above the average of the three decades to 1990, which is the standard reference period, though only by 0.19C.

The first decade of the 21st century was also the warmest since standard records began in 1910. And based on preliminary data to November 30, sea surface temperatures around Australia were the warmest on record last year, as were those for the past decade.

The news for the rest of the world is not so promising, either. The World Meteorological Organisation, on the basis of data collected from 189 countries and territories (co-conspirators all?), says the year to the end of October was the warmest since instrumental climate records started in 1850 - 0.55C above the 1961-90 average of 14C.

Perhaps the cold northern winter will bring the final figure, which will not be published until March, down a little but the WMO was confident enough last month to say that 2010 would rate in the top three warmest years.

And the decade also was the warmest on record - despite the annual peak in 1998.

That puts a bit of a dent in the argument that the world has been cooling since 1998.

While the records cover only a relatively short period, the trends happen to follow closely the predictions over the past 40 years of temperature rises resulting from increased greenhouse gas emissions.

In 1972, John Sawyer of the British Meteorological Office estimated an increase of about 0.6C by the end of the century. The actual figure was about 0.5C.

Most scientists agree that doubling the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is likely to lead to warming of 2C-3C, an amount that risks significant economic and environmental damage.

So far the increase since the mid-18th century of all greenhouse gases has been 38 per cent, including a 27.5 per cent rise from 1990 to 2009.

As well as rising temperatures, the WMO says that Arctic sea ice shrank last year to its third lowest area in the satellite records and was offset only slightly by Antarctic sea ice at just above the long-term average. Global snow cover is falling and sea levels rising.

Despite that, much of the debate about global warming still is conducted in terms of future and uncertain consequences.

Perhaps we should start looking harder at the present. Recent extreme weather events include not only the Victorian bushfires and record floods in Queensland. According to the international insurance group Munich Re, 2010 saw the second-highest number of natural catastrophes since

1980, with 90 per cent of them weather-related.

Australia always has been a land of drought and flooding rains, and weather records are broken as regularly as cricket records. But not in the way they have been recently.

The temperature of 46.4C in Melbourne on Black Saturday was more than 3C above the previous highest for February.

July 29 last year saw the temperature reach 38.2C in Moscow, while for the whole month the mean temperature was more than 2C above the previous record.

Munich Re says the heatwave and associated fires and air pollution in central Russia killed at least 56,000 people, making it the worst natural disaster in Russia's history.

Pakistan experienced its worst ever floods, costing 1769 lives. Munich Re says the hurricane season in the North Atlantic was one of the most severe in the last century even though most countries, including the US, had a lucky escape, with the storms mostly over the sea.

So, can we blame climate change? Probably to some degree, even cautious scientists tend to say.

CSIRO research has identified climate change as contributing to the 20 per cent decline in rainfall in southwest Western Australia over the past 40 years, as well as the reduced rainfall in southeastern Australia.

Neville Nicholls, meteorologist, Monash University professor and one of the lead authors of the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, says of the Queensland floods: "The reality is that we don't know if there is a climate change component in it."

On his estimate, the current La Nina that usually generates higher rainfall in eastern and northern Australia is the strongest or second strongest we have ever experienced. While there is no evidence to link La Nina to climate change, one possible connection is that water temperatures in the oceans around Australia have never been so warm and the La Nina has been unusually strong.

"But honestly we don't know," says Nicholls.

Nor does he attribute the Victorian bushfires per se to global warming. "The particular weather situation we had is the kind of weather situation we have had in the past: it was hot, it was dry and it was windy."

The differences were that the 12 years of drought was twice as long as the previous longest drought in the region, the heatwave at the end of January 2009 was the worst Melbourne had ever experienced and the temperatures on Black Saturday saw a large step up from the previous record. "What you can say is that there is very strong evidence that global warming exacerbated the fire situation."

Applying the same reasoning, Nicholls does not argue that climate change is responsible for any other single event.

But he does point to the succession of extraordinary heatwaves, with big jumps in record temperatures, starting in Europe in 2003 and continuing all around the world, culminating in Russia last year. More than 17 countries broke their maximum temperature records in 2010. "Putting them together, you really have to strain credibility to say it has nothing to do with climate change," he says.

"With climate change you expect many more of these really hot events and that is what we are getting. At the same time there are still records being set for cold temperatures. But for the last couple of decades we have certainly been getting more hot records being set than cold records."

Even if the world achieved what so far has proved beyond it - a mechanism to stabilise greenhouse emissions at 450 parts per million of CO₂ - global temperatures still will rise by an estimated 2C; that is, four times the increase that has occurred in the past 30 years. That means

further consequences already are locked in and we will have to turn our minds increasingly to adapting to them.

Nicholls says most developed countries, including Australia, already have set up heatwave alert systems.

Other changes will be harder. Reducing water allocations in the Murray-Darling Basin is still years away at best, and the recent rain will tempt politicians to postpone it further.

Building rail lines that don't buckle and electricity systems that don't fail, as they did at the time of the Victorian bushfires, let alone the bigger tasks of managing increasingly vulnerable coastlines and transforming agriculture, will be big challenges but ones that only will get bigger the longer we delay.

12. No need to go gaga over Gaia

Andy Pitman

From: The Australian January 07, 2011 12:00AM 46 comments

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/no-need-to-go-gaga-over-gaia/story-e6frg6zo-1225983237159>

SCIENCE is damned difficult to communicate effectively and sometimes fine science communicators can miss the mark.

In a recent ABC Radio National Science Show interview with presenter Robyn Williams, Tim Flannery, a paleontologist, talked about Gaia.

The term was coined by William Golding to label a theory developed by James Lovelock, a fellow of the Royal Society and among the most important scientists of the 20th century. Lovelock also called it geophysiology, or how the Earth, as an integrated and fully connected system, actually works. Lovelock forced the climate science community to move from thinking about the climate as separate pieces - the ocean, the atmosphere, the land - to thinking about the Earth as a coupled system that includes the atmosphere and oceans as well as geology, biology and chemistry.

As noted by Flannery, the discipline that now works to understand this is called Earth system science, and in December a long-term plan was released by the Australian Academy of Science on precisely this issue.

Flannery made a series of eloquent points in his interview and the transcript is worth reading in full. However, he also said: "I think that within this century the concept of strong Gaia will actually become physically manifest." This is about as silly, in my view, as Flannery's statement on the ABC's Lateline program in November 2009 that global warming had not occurred over the past 10 years, that "there hasn't been a continuation of that warming trend". This statement was incorrect and highlights the dangers of a scientist commenting outside their area of expertise.

Communicating complex science is about accuracy and balance. Flannery is not a climate expert. One becomes an expert in a field by contributing, over years or decades, via peer-reviewed scientific literature. Of course, reporting climate science is also about accuracy and balance. It is easy to attack a few paragraphs of Flannery's interview and forget the wisdom explicit in others.

For example, The Australian in its editorial on January 4 suggests there is some disconnect between "freezing winters and global warming". Climate scientists would not consider this situation to be disconnected. Global warming means the average warming of the globe and is fully consistent with cooling in some regions.

The same editorial also suggests sea-level-rise estimates are wrong (that depends which ones), that glaciers will not melt (but they are melting) and that these statements are based on "hyperbole and not scientific hypothesis" (which is not remotely true). Climate scientists certainly agree with Rupert Murdoch's call to "give the planet the benefit of the doubt", although virtually all would state the risks more strongly.

For the record, that the Earth is warming due to greenhouse gases emitted by human activities is as certain as pretty well anything else in mainstream science.

How individuals have sown doubt about this, along with dangers of tobacco smoke, CFCs, and acid rain, is meticulously explained by Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in their recent book, *Merchants of Doubt*. They show how a handful of extremists have obscured the facts with skill, energy and persistence.

Sadly, denying the facts about global warming does not make it go away. You can jump off a cliff and deny gravity all you like, but it will not stop you hitting the ground. Yes, there is scientific doubt about gravity, but we understand it well enough to fly a satellite through the solar system.

There is scientific doubt about global warming, too, but we know with certainty that continued emissions of carbon dioxide will lead to warming, rising sea levels and ocean acidification at unprecedented rates, and that these changes will trigger expenses and outcomes that dwarf the costs of actually solving the problem.

Rather than worrying about what a paleontologist thinks about Gaia, let's worry about what climate scientists and Earth system scientists say about global warming. We should be seeing more commentary in our leading national newspapers that attacks Australia's slow response to global warming.

Let's critique decades of atrocious under-investment in low-carbon-emission technologies that can help us confront a carbon-limited world.

We urgently need to develop an economic Plan B that reduces our reliance on exporting coal to Asia in case new investment by Asia to wean itself off our coal succeeds.

So, a campaign by The Australian for an economic transition to Plan B, to reduce our dependence on coal exports, would be timely. Can anyone really argue that an Australian economy that exports low-carbon-emission technology could be a bad thing?

There is always a risk that China's multimillion dollar investment to wean itself off our raw materials might succeed, and then having an alternative economic base might prove to be an extremely wise investment.

Andy Pitman is director of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate System Science and lead author of the third and fourth science assessment reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

13. Nuclear industry has no future, Mr Barnett

By Scott Ludlam

January 13th, 2011, 12:15 pm

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/opinion/post/-/blog/theburningissue/post/1794/comment/1/>

Premier Colin Barnett said last month that nuclear power was a "proved and safe source of energy" and that a site for a new nuclear power plant in Australia should be identified. A few days earlier, Queensland Premier Anna Bligh had called for a review of the ALP's long-standing ban on nuclear power.

Mr Barnett and Ms Bligh have lined up with some senior coalition and ALP figures pushing nuclear power as an answer to both dwindling fossil fuel supplies and the challenge of reducing carbon emissions.

In reality, there is no global nuclear renaissance, and we should hope there never will be. Since the early 1980s, the industry has been sinking under the weight of the vast costs of this obsolete and risky technology. There are nine fewer nuclear power stations operating worldwide today than there were in 2002. There are 33 fewer nuclear power stations in Europe now than there were in 1989. The US has not built one in 36 years and the Japanese have virtually stopped building them.

In August 2009, the International Atomic Energy Agency listed 52 reactors as "under construction". Thirteen of them had been listed as "under construction" for more than 20 years. Twenty-six have hit construction delays, many of them serious. If we're going to debate the issue again in Australia, we'll need some answers on why much of the rest of the world has rejected the technology, four countries account for two-thirds of the reactors supposedly "under construction".

South Korea, one of the four, is forging ahead with a handful of reactors under threat of a terrible artillery bombardment from its unstable and paranoid northern neighbour. The consequences of a missile strike on a fossil or renewable power station is that the lights go out. Nuclear plants are different. They have been described as "pre-deployed radiological weapons" since the release of even a small percentage of the core's isotope inventory in a country as densely populated as South Korea would kill an incalculable number and require the resettlement of several million people.

Then, of course, there is the question of cost. Coal, gas and all renewable energy technologies that I'm aware of are getting less expensive with each new generation as expertise develops and economies of scale kick in. Nuclear power, on the other hand gets more expensive with every generation. Why?

A report presented at a solar industry conference in Canberra in November by Dr Mark Diesendorf, deputy director of the Institute of Environmental Studies, found the cheapest renewable energy sources, including landfill gas, onshore wind, conventional geothermal and hydroelectricity, are already cost-competitive with conventional nuclear energy power plants. By 2020, offshore wind farms, solar thermal and solar photovoltaics are all projected to be less expensive than nuclear energy.

A key challenge for the nuclear industry is water. Water scarcity is already a serious problem for power generation in Australia, particularly with our overdependence on water-intensive coal-fired power plants. Nuclear power generation consumes more water than coal. In December 2006, a report by the Commonwealth Department of Parliamentary Services noted the water requirements for a nuclear power station were greater than those of other power stations by margins ranging from 20 to 83 per cent. Those calculations don't include the vast consumption of water involved in operating uranium mines. In 2007, the Roxby Downs mine in South Australia was using 35 million litres of water daily.

As always, the eternal problem of long-lived radioactive waste is ignored by nuclear cheerleaders. Will the nuclear advocates vouch for the capacity of a dump site to keep the dangerous waste secure for centuries? We've already seen the brutal way in which the Federal Government has sought to force a domestic radioactive waste dump on a Northern Territory community.

In the light of the State Government's comprehensive failure to regulate the shipment of lead, it's no wonder many people are baulking at the idea of uranium shipments bound for overseas power stations or potentially being transported to power stations within Australia. From beginning to end, this is an industry that deserves no place in a modern, renewably powered Australia.

Scott Ludlam is a WA Greens senator