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1. We can't afford to kill off reactors

Bjorn Lomborg, The Australian April 19, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/we-cant-afford-to-kill-off-reactors/story-e6frg6ux-1226041177823>

WHEN parts of Japan were devastated recently by an earthquake and subsequent tsunami, news of the human toll was quickly overshadowed by global fears of radioactive fallout from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The concern was understandable: radiation is very frightening. I grew up in Denmark when fear of nuclear power was pervasive.

But our latest nuclear fears have broader implications, especially for energy supply and our desire to shift away from reliance on fossil fuels.

It is difficult to step back at the time of a natural disaster to gain a broader perspective; even attempting to do so can feel crass. But there are some facts we should not overlook.

During the round-the-clock coverage of the nuclear drama, the spectre of Chernobyl has been raised repeatedly. It is worth noting that the worst nuclear disaster in history directly caused only 31 fatalities. The World Health Organisation estimates that 4000 deaths could be linked to the disaster in 70 years, whereas the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development projects a range of 9000 to 33,000 deaths during this period.

That is substantial. But consider that, according to the OECD, every year nearly one million people die from fine-particle outdoor air pollution. Yet this death toll provokes no discernible fear in the developed world.

Of course, every country with nuclear power facilities should revise its safety measures in light of the Japanese disaster, which raised obvious questions about the sites chosen for such facilities. Clearly, plants located near tsunami-prone areas need to be reconsidered, and some countries have power plants in disturbingly close proximity to seismic faults and to large cities.

But while the US's commitment to nuclear power was quickly reaffirmed by Barack Obama, some European governments took the knee-jerk decision to freeze all new nuclear-energy projects immediately and, in the case of Germany, not to extend the life of existing reactors. This will leave a gap Germany cannot fill with alternative energy sources, leaving it little choice but to rely further on coal power.

We see coal as a polluting but reasonably safe energy source compared with nuclear energy.

Yet, in China alone, coalmining accidents kill more than 2000 people each year and coal is a leading cause of smog, acid rain, global warming and air toxicity.

As a result of Germany's decision, its annual carbon emissions are expected to rise by as much as 10 per cent when European Union emissions are rising as the continent shakes off the effects of the financial crisis.

Germany doesn't have a low-carbon alternative if it shuts its nuclear plants and the same is true of most other countries. Alternative energy sources are too expensive and not reliable enough to replace fossil fuels.

Although safety concerns are paramount right now, the construction of new nuclear plants faces another hurdle: they are very expensive. New nuclear power plants have high upfront costs (which can be politically challenging), including a very complicated, slow and fraught planning process. When completed, the total cost of nuclear power is significantly higher than the cheapest fossil-fuel source.

And society must bear additional costs in terms of the risks of spent-fuel storage and large-scale accidents. Moreover, in most parts of the world where energy consumption is expanding, nuclear proliferation is an issue.

Then there is the question of maintaining existing plants. Decommissioning nuclear reactors may make us feel safer, but we should acknowledge that this will often mean compensating for the lost output with more reliance on coal, meaning more emissions that contribute to global warming, and more deaths, both from coal extraction and air pollution.

Moreover, given that the plants are already paid for, waste facilities are already in place and the high decommissioning cost will have to be paid regardless of timing, the actual operating costs are very low: half or lower per kilowatt-hour than the cost of the cheapest fossil fuels.

The answer is more research and development, not only into next-generation, safer nuclear energy but also into energy sources such as solar and wind, which provide well below 1 per cent of the planet's energy. Alarmingly, this research has fallen off during the past three decades.

At protests calling on politicians to respond to climate change, a cry has rung out: "No coal, no gas, no nukes, no kidding!" The harsh reality is that we do not yet have the luxury of dumping coal, gas and nuclear power. Until we can find an alternative, reducing reliance on one of them means that another must take its place.

Bjorn Lomborg is the head of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre.

2. We must promote nuclear safety

Kevin Rudd, The Australian May 02, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/we-must-promote-nuclear-safety/story-e6frg6so-1226047941632>

TWENTY-five years after the world's worst nuclear disaster occurred at Chernobyl, events at Fukushima have reminded us of the harm that nuclear accidents can cause. While it would be wrong to equate the two accidents, it is clear we cannot continue with a business-as-usual approach to nuclear safety.

More international involvement is required in the regulation of safety standards at civil nuclear facilities. We also need to ensure better international co-ordination of nuclear crisis response-and-consequence management.

There are sound reasons for this. A nuclear accident in one country has consequences in other countries. We saw this all too alarmingly in the case of Chernobyl. Moreover, people around the world want to have greater assurances of the safety of nuclear energy. They deserve the highest level of confidence in nuclear facilities. Without such confidence, the future of nuclear energy cannot be assured.

Australia has a direct interest and role to play in an intensified focus on nuclear safety. We have a strong reputation as a responsible supplier of uranium. And we have a long history of contribution to nuclear safety worldwide. Australia sets firm conditions of supply in relation to safeguards and non-proliferation. We should use what we have learned from promoting safeguards to also promote safety in viable ways.

So what practically can we do? First, it is clear that we must work to achieve greater international oversight of nuclear safety under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency. IAEA safety standards are held up as international best practice. But there is no international legal mechanism to oblige states to recognise or implement them.

So how can we take this forward? An initial step could be to explore the possibility of countries operating nuclear power plants and other facilities concluding bilateral safety agreements with the IAEA.

This could open the way for the IAEA to expand its safeguards inspection role to include safety auditing. Such a move would facilitate better international benchmarking and continual improvement in reactor design and safety features, as well as regulations and standards.

Second, governments should also consider ways of augmenting co-operation on emergency response-and-consequence management. The IAEA could appoint an independent panel of international experts, who could analyse incidents and provide advice on dealing with them.

Third, more needs to be done to encourage industry to share in-house compliance techniques. There should be no trade secrets on measures for meeting safety standards. Industry must stand ready to implement the changes that the community expects and that governments require.

Much good work is being done by organisations such as the World Association of Nuclear Operators, but it is also up to governments to foster such exchanges, since they are often principal stakeholders in their countries' nuclear industry.

In Australia's case, we will focus closely on co-operation with potential new nuclear energy entrants in our region, urging the adoption of best practices for siting, construction and operation of new nuclear facilities, regulation, emergency preparedness and safety culture.

Australia will be developing these proposals for consideration at the IAEA-hosted high-level conference on nuclear safety next month. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev have made thoughtful contributions, which we look forward to discussing. We encourage all nations to think about what we can do together to improve nuclear safety.

Non-proliferation has long - and rightly - been the subject of concerted international efforts under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and IAEA and national safeguards.

Nuclear security has received long overdue attention through President Barack Obama's successful push to commit 47 countries to work to secure sensitive nuclear materials worldwide within four years.

The time has come - 25 years after the tragic accident at Chernobyl - to do all we can to prevent nuclear incidents, and to mitigate their impact when they do occur. This may be a long and complicated path, but it is one that we must take.

Kevin Rudd is the Foreign Minister

3. Nuclear power should be an option in any carbon debate

Peter van Onselen, Contributing editor, The Australian April 27, 2011 12:00AM
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/opinion/nuclear-power-should-be-an-option-in-any-carbon-debate/story-e6frg9if-1226045227018>

EARLIER this month, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Julie Bishop opened the door to a

nuclear debate in this country. It received surprisingly little attention given how politically risky advocating nuclear power can be.

"I believe that if your priority is to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, then nuclear power must be in the mix", Bishop told Australian Agenda on Sky News. Pressed on whether that included nuclear power being used specifically here in Australia, she answered: "We don't have a need to at present, because we're reliant on coal." But this soon followed: "If the carbon tax taxes the coal industry out of existence, we will have to find an alternative baseload low-emission technology, and that's nuclear power."

Coal, as we know, is a very dirty means of producing energy. Alternatives such as renewable energies don't provide sufficient base load power to be anything other than an adjunct to a more substantial way of producing energy.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition put her cards on the table. If Australia wants to move on from the use of coal to fire its power stations, and thereby pursue long-term emissions reductions, we need to consider nuclear power. More than consider it. Bishop put it up as the clear alternative. The time might not be right now, as Bishop enunciated. But it will come, unless we determine not to act in more than a token way on climate change.

We need to remember there are two unofficial ideological factions in the Liberal Party on this issue: those who believe in climate change, but are politically cognisant of the divisive effect it can have on party unity, and those who don't - the so-called climate change sceptics. The latter are outnumbered by the grouping Bishop is a part of, but the events in late 2009, when Malcolm Turnbull was rolled as leader, still haunt the consciousness of MPs.

The opposition spokesman for climate action, Greg Hunt, is another member of the first group. He has echoed Bishop's observations, but with a strong political caveat. "I have no in principle objection (to nuclear power) in Australia, but (hold) an absolutely firm view that we would need bipartisan support or otherwise it could both rip communities apart; and secondly, there's always the sovereign risk of a future government changing the investment regime. So until there's bipartisan support, I don't see it happening in Australia."

Rip communities apart maybe, and a sovereign risk if a new nuclear sector risked being wound back by a new government, certainly. But these roadblocks are distractions from the real barrier: nuclear power would be political poison and Hunt knows it. That's a defining difference between the modern age and reforming periods from the past. There is no guts in modern politics. Imagine if John Howard had taken that view on the GST.

In the aftermath of the ongoing problems in Japan, now is hardly the time for a debate on nuclear power to gain momentum. But that doesn't diminish the need - for environmental reasons no less - to have one. We shouldn't forget that for all the problems at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant in Japan, radiation exposure has been contained. Compare that to the many deaths each year from coalmining.

Were Australia to implement a nuclear program, we wouldn't need to worry about unstable geography: Australia is considered the most stable land mass. We are ideally suited to take advantage of our massive uranium reserves. And as the world's highest emitter on a per capita basis, nuclear power is an obvious choice for anyone serious about reducing our carbon footprint.

Yet Labor strongly opposes nuclear power while advocating a tax on carbon, which it pledged not to introduce during the last election. The Coalition passionately believes in nuclear power, yet it is pursuing a direct action plan that doesn't support a nuclear industry. No courage there.

Meanwhile the Greens - a party that is supposed to look after the environment - have the future of the Labor government in its hands in the House, and will soon control the Senate and with that the national policy agenda. Greens will go on standing up for the environment by blocking the only option to seriously protect it from climate change. If they got their wish and nuclear power was wound back globally, emissions in countries such as China, the US, France and Italy would skyrocket.

No wonder people seriously interested in policy debates shun politics and choose to pursue other career interests instead.

4. Greens Israel boycott bad for environment

Graham Lloyd, Amos Aikman, The Australian May 05, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/climate/greens-israel-boycott-bad-for-environment/story-e6frg6xf-1226050089361>

GREENS ban on imports from Israel would target the very products the party claims are at the forefront of its environmental and social agenda.

It would stop the import of the revolutionary combined solar electricity and hot water system that Israel-based Zenith Solar has agreed to install at a Port Melbourne ambulance station.

Zenith Solar founder and chief executive Roy Segev said the mirror dish technology represented the first solar system that could be cost-effective with conventional electricity and not need a government subsidy.

He said the high efficiency of the Zenith system was achieved by using the same mirrors to heat water and generate electricity on a small, high-tech solar voltaic cell.

Mr Segev said the units cost \$27,000 each and could produce 4.5 kilowatts of electricity and 11 kW equivalent of hot water for the equivalent of 9.5c a kW hour.

The proposed demonstration plant in Port Melbourne would be the first outside Israel.

During the NSW state election in March, Fiona Byrne, the Marrickville Mayor and unsuccessful Greens candidate for the local inner-western Sydney seat of the same name, drew the ire of residents, fellow councillors and state and federal politicians alike after it was revealed her council's boycott of goods and services from Israel would cost ratepayers more than \$4 million to implement. The council later dropped its controversial plan, but the NSW Greens retain their policy of supporting the global boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

A former NSW upper house member who recently moved to the Senate, Lee Rhiannon, also maintains her support for the BDS movement, even though Greens leader Bob Brown has publicly stated it is not federal Greens policy.

A Greens ban would also target the ultra-efficient drip irrigation systems developed by Israeli company Netafim, which is at the leading edge of water conservation around the world, including Australia.

Netafim chief sustainability officer Igal Aisenberg helped develop the drip irrigation technology on the Hatzetim Kibbutz where he lives under the socialist principles of "from each according to their capacity and to each according to their need".

Netafim introduced the world's first drip irrigation system in 1966.

The company factory is still located at the Hatzetim Kibbutz, which has been transformed from a desert to a true oasis with mature trees and diverse bird life.

Netafim has 14 manufacturing plants including one in Australia.

5. Greenie' backing for uranium

Michelle Ridley, The West Australian, May 6, 2011, 5:13 am

<http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/wa/9326364/greenie-backing-for-uranium/>

A Canadian environmentalist who turned his back on Greenpeace is in Perth to promote uranium mining.

Patrick Moore, who claims to have co-founded Greenpeace in 1971 and was a director of the organisation for 15 years, is in Perth as a guest of Cameco, one of the world's biggest uranium producers.

Dr Moore will speak at a breakfast organised by Cameco and the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy this morning on electricity generation, risk and the nuclear power industry.

"In the wake of Fukushima, people are suggesting that this proves that nuclear energy is too risky," he said.

"It is the safest of all of the major energy electricity generating technologies."

Dr Moore has been involved in a war of words with Greenpeace since he left the organisation in 1986.

The international environmental group acknowledges Dr Moore was one of its first members but denies he was a co-founder and has attacked his paid lobby work.

"I left Greenpeace because I wanted to work on solutions rather than just being in confrontation politics," Dr Moore said.

"I believe, beginning around the mid-1980s, they embarked on a course of extremism in their environmental policy."

Dr Moore, who has a PhD in ecology, said Greenpeace's initial success in the 1970s was a result of the professional expertise of its early members, well targeted campaigns and practical actions.

"We were the first group that really linked peace and ecology," he said.

"Many groups were just anti-nuke or anti-war and other groups were environmental.

"The very first campaign was aimed at not only preventing the worst disaster that civilisation could face, which was all out nuclear war, but we said that it would also be a disaster for the environment."

6. Wasting money on climate change betrays sick

Joanne Nova, The Australian May 07, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/commentary/wasting-money-on-climate-change-betrays-sick/story-e6frgd0x-1226051438498>

LOST opportunities are invisible but deadly. On climate change, the call to buy insurance by pricing carbon is a cop-out. Where is the cost-benefit analysis?

We're thinking of axing Australian medical research yet we're supporting solar panel manufacturers in China. It doesn't have to be this way.

All the money spent employing green police, subsidising solar or researching how to pump carbon dioxide underground is money not spent on medical research.

Opportunity lost is a killer. The path not taken could be lined with happier, longer lives. Only the best evidence and real debate have a chance of helping us see through the fog to pick the better road.

While most scientists agree CO2 causes some warming, there is great debate about just how much. If CO2 has only a minor effect on temperature then spending, say, \$1 billion on inefficient roof-top solar panels is not just wasted money, it's a choice that will kill people. We won't be able to say exactly who it will kill but we can virtually guarantee that some people will die in the future who could have been saved.

Why? Solar energy costs us more than five times what coal-powered energy does. So instead of spending \$1bn on solar panels, we could have spent \$200 million on cheap electricity and used the other \$800m to double our medical research budget.

Right now, the government is planning to cut \$133m from our \$800m annual medical research budget. The Australian government has spent or will spend \$3.8bn on initiatives to combat climate change across four years. (The US government was spending about \$7bn a year at last count.) When Julia Gillard spends money on climate-related work instead of medical research, she is making a choice about the net benefits and it's supposedly based on science. It's true sooner or later medical research will get the answers right, but for someone who is sick with a deadly disease, sooner makes a life-and-death difference.

If our government-funded climate establishment makes the wrong guess about what humidity does in a warmer world, CO2 emissions become trivial and inconsequential. But the money diverted or delayed from better causes leaves a trail of destruction that cannot be repaired. Money can always be replaced, but lives lost are gone for good.

Julio Licinio, director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research at the Australian National University, put together a passionate, disturbing advertisement two weeks ago, a plea to stop cuts to medical research funding. His sister died aged four from a disease that is treatable today.

Which four-year-old in 2018 will die because Gillard introduced a carbon tax instead of increasing medical research funding? Which father will die in 2022 who would have lived if we had doubled our funding for medical research? It is for people such as four-year-old Fabiola that we should keep fighting for rational debate. Bad science makes for bad policy. Poor reasoning is deadly.

Medical research is blossoming at a phenomenal, historic pace.

The exponential curve in gene therapy, telomerase research, genomics and glycobiology is barely beginning. Four significant breakthroughs were made in medical research in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 2000.

These were the kinds of breakthroughs people had worked for decades to make, and some were not predicted even a few years beforehand. The human genome project was finished five years ahead of schedule and for a fraction of the expected price.

Right now, a year of medical research really does make a difference. These are the areas where we will be left behind and it will hurt. These are the industries where we need to stay at the head of the pack, not just to save lives but to save the economy as well.

Access Economics estimated in 2003 that every dollar invested in the Australian health research and development sector returned at least \$5 in national economic development.

When government-funded Australian researchers discover treatments, we own vital intellectual property. We not only export products the world wants, we avoid being beholden to foreign patent holders. Some effective cancer drugs cost \$2000 a week. Isn't that the kind of research we want to own?

If we lead the world in medicine, the world is our oyster. If it turns out clean carbon technology is useful, we can buy it with the spare change from the profits of medical research. We know we need a cure for cancer. We don't know if the rest of the world will want to pump CO2 underground 10 years from now.

When we lead the world in putting inefficient solar panels on roofs, we only help Chinese manufacturers and we win a race no one wants to win. You can't export second-hand solar panels or resell old pink batts.

Can we start looking at the cost benefits of all our policies instead of reasoning by fallacy? The precautionary principle is no principle of science: it's a blind tool that works for both sides of any debate.

To quote Licinio: "In 1964 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma of childhood was 100 per cent fatal. Now the cure rate is over 80 per cent, thanks to medical research. When Fabiola died I was so upset that it took me decades to recover. From protracted mourning to survivor guilt, the impact of that death shaped my life. For someone like myself who suffered tremendously due to a disease [that] was incurable and whose cure has been subsequently achieved through medical research, the

proposed cuts to the NHRMC [National Health and Medical Research Council] budget are unconscionable.

"On a very positive note, my mother, Aurea, lost her own mother early on. My grandmother died at age 47 due to malignant hypertension, which was out of control, and sky-high blood pressures. My mother suffered enormously because of that death; and she knew that she had the exact same disease. Later in life, my mother also developed breast cancer. However, medical research always caught up with her and her blood pressure was always well controlled. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer she had state-of-the-art treatment, guided by medical research. My mother died in 2007 neither from hypertension nor from breast cancer. Medical research gave my mother 40 years of active, happy and highly productive life."

Joanne Nova is a commentator and the author of The Skeptic's Handbook. She is a former associate lecturer in science communication at the Australian National University.

7. Ferguson blasts WA Labor over uranium

Sarah-Jane Tasker and Mark Schliebs, The Australian May 14, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/ferguson-blasts-wa-labor-over-uranium/story-fn59niix-1226055619141>

RESOURCES Minister Martin Ferguson yesterday labelled the West Australian Labor Party's opposition to uranium mining as "ridiculous" and unsustainable, as he called on the new NSW and Victoria governments to reassess their bans on the industry.

Mr Ferguson said the WA branch of the Labor Party needed to reconsider its policy to reinstate a ban on uranium mining if it returns to power, in terms of sovereign risk and any compensation it would need to pay the sector.

"Their current position is ridiculous and not sustainable," Mr Ferguson said at a uranium conference in Sydney.

Responding to the comments, WA Opposition Leader Eric Ripper said WA Labor would determine its own policy and would not respond to hectoring from Canberra.

"Mr Ferguson's choice of colourful language is unfortunate and would be even more so if it encouraged any of his caucus colleagues to respond with the same sort of analysis with any federal government policy," he said.

8. Summer of disaster 'not climate change': Rajendra Pachauri

Graham Lloyd, Environment editor, The Australian May 17, 2011 12:00AM

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/summer-of-disaster-not-climate-change-rajendra-pachauri/story-fn59niix-1226057100026><http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/summer-of-disaster-not-climate-change-rajendra-pachauri/story-fn59niix-1226057100026>

SPECIFIC natural disasters such as Cyclone Yasi and the Brisbane floods could not be directly linked to man-made climate change, the world's leading climate change authority said yesterday.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change chairman Rajendra Pachauri said the general observation that climate change was bringing about an increase in extreme weather events was valid but scientists needed to provide much finer detail.

"Frankly, it is difficult to take a season or two and come up with any conclusions on those on a scientific basis," Dr Pachauri said.

"What we can say very clearly is the aggregate impact of climate change on all these events, which are taking place at much higher frequency and intensity all over the world.

"On that there is very little doubt; the scientific evidence is very, very strong. But what happens in Queensland or what happens in Russia or for that matter the floods in the Mississippi River right now, whether there is a link between those and climate change is very difficult to establish. So I don't think anyone can make a categorical statement on that."

Dr Pachauri's comments contradict assertions by Greens leader Bob Brown in the wake of the floods that the coal industry was to blame because the sector's contribution to global warming was responsible for the extreme weather conditions.

Scientists had concluded that the floods were caused by record high temperatures in the oceans around Australia, Senator Brown said at the time.

As experts from around the world meet on the Gold Coast this week to finalise a special report on global warming and extreme weather events, which is due out in November, Dr Pachauri admitted the IPCC had been damaged by recent controversies over leaked emails and its use of poor-quality research.

But he said the organisation welcomed debate and was not guilty of overstating its case.

Dr Pachauri said he was pessimistic about the possibility of a breakthrough in negotiations for a global deal on action on climate change in South Africa in December and said the hard-fought politics on climate change in Australia mirrored what was happening around the world, particularly in the US.

But when it came to commenting on the state of Australian politics and climate change, Dr Pachauri played a straight bat literally.

Anticipating questions about whether Australia was doing enough, he said he had rehearsed his lines.

"Australia is not doing enough in cricket. About climate change, I just can't say."

He said the IPCC was "doing what we can" in relation to concerns about its reputation.

"We . . . are focused on producing the best possible reports that we can. It is really up to governments to take actions that are in their best interests and society at large."

Asked whether the IPCC had suffered as a result of overstating the climate change case, Dr Pachauri said: "There are people who say the opposite, as well."

"We welcome debate, we welcome discussion on all our findings, but a number of people also express the opinion the IPCC has understated the case and we expect in the fifth assessment report we will be able to provide a lot more knowledge by which, hopefully, the debate can become a little more focused," he said.

Dr Pachauri said he believed there would always be politicisation of the IPCC findings because they had a profound impact on human society and governments.

"To expect there would be no politics around the findings of our reports would be unrealistic," he said.

"But we certainly welcome scientific debate because science only thrives on debate."

"If you shut yourself off from questioning and doubt and discourse on whatever science is doing, you are limiting the ability and the power of science to provide solutions."

"We function by involving the best scientists from all over the world."

He said 60 per cent of the scientists contributing to the fifth assessment had not had anything to do with the IPCC before.

"It is not a closed system. We involve and bring in the very best expertise we can . . . from all over the world."

"Every step is subject to expert review but this is a message that

we have not been able to get out effectively and this has been a shortcoming.

"Our ability to communicate what we are doing has clearly not been adequate and we are now taking the steps to bring about adequate capacity within the IPCC," he said.

9. We emit less CO₂ than Combet gives us credit for

Climate Change | Alan Moran *The Australian* 17th May, 2011

<http://www.ipa.org.au/news/2364/we-emit-less-co2-than-combet-gives-us-credit-for>

On April 13, Climate Change Minister Greg Combet's spin for a carbon tax pushed new frontiers in the art of being economical with the truth.

He said: "Australia release[s] more pollution per person than any other country in the developed world, more than the US."

In a chapter of a recently published anthology, *Energy, Sustainability and the Environment*, edited by F.P. Sioshansi, I observed: "International trade means countries that export energy-intensive products incur emissions on behalf of other countries.

"This tends to reduce the national emission levels of many developed countries, while exaggerating those of some developing countries and resource rich countries like Australia."

Recently released UN data confirms and quantifies this. It shows that about 11 per cent of the US's carbon dioxide emissions are outsourced; that is, they are incorporated within imports. In Japan it is 18 per cent and for Switzerland more than 50 per cent.

By the same token, Australia's emission levels are overstated because we are a net exporter of goods that incorporate carbon dioxide. While on the basis of production our carbon dioxide emission levels are 16 tonnes per capita, on the basis of consumption they are only 13.5 tonnes. This means Australia's per capita emissions are lower than those in nine of the 35 developed countries.

The vastness of Australia is one reason we use more energy and hence have higher carbon dioxide emissions than many other countries. But Australia's sheer size also means the continent is a significant natural sink for carbon dioxide emissions.

If Australia is credited with these natural sequestrations, this markedly changes the comparison with other countries.

Australia's land mass naturally absorbs about 137 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. If this is subtracted from the 550 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (or its equivalent) that is actually emitted, Australia would be average among the developed countries.

There are further reasons Australia's emission levels are swollen relative to those of other countries. Among these is the relative saturation of hydro power availability (although additional capacity would be available in Tasmania if the ALP-Greens alliance lifted its veto). Similarly, we have no nuclear power, again in part because of politics.

These two emission-free power sources account for nearly 20 per cent of the electricity generated by developed countries but less than 5 per cent for Australia.

In reality, all these numbers are simply propaganda tools. Every country emits carbon dioxide levels consistent with its stage of development, costs of different energy and raw material sources and economic structures. And although some countries have introduced regulations that force reductions in carbon dioxide emissions more aggressively, aside from the European Union, Australia appears to have been as willing as any other country to impose the costs these entail.

Contrary to this view, Combet suggests we are not pulling our weight. To craft evidence for this, he decided to prejudge the Productivity Commission report his government commissioned to obtain information on different countries' effective carbon tax rates. Instead he drew from material assembled by London-based Vivid Economics that his department commissioned.

As Gary Johns showed in The Australian on April 28 ("Dodgy figures and wrong questions plague the carbon debate"), the material contains some howlers. Among these is a claim that China has a carbon price of \$8 a tonne. This was arrived at by assigning, as a carbon tax, China's policy of ceasing to favour small (and carbon-intensive) electricity producers. Australia implemented that measure with the electricity market reform introduced by the Kennett government in Victoria and supported by the Keating federal government's competition policy reforms. Needless to say, nobody here claims this to be a form of carbon tax.

Combet also used the Vivid Economics report to claim falsely that the US and India were acting to introduce such taxes and that, based on the report, we were delinquent in our own levels of carbon tax. But for Australia the Vivid Economics material failed to acknowledge the commonwealth's requirement that 20 per cent of electricity by 2020 must be sourced from exotic forms of renewable energy.

This scheme is L.A.W. law. It imposes high-cost wind and solar on the consumer and has a carbon price effect that grows year by year, reaching \$13 a tonne by 2020. The commonwealth's proposed carbon tax at \$20-\$30 a tonne would be on top of this.

Laughably, Combet added that acting to introduce a tax was also in our national interest.

What we are in fact finding is that some businesses think it is in their interest to introduce a "carbon price", with all the potential this offers them for creating new trading markets. Some other businesses, now joined by BHP Billiton, think it is a good idea as long as they are immune. Others realise there can be no winners and courageously say so despite government pressures on them.

More significantly, opinion polls show a rising majority of people do not think it is in our national interest to introduce a carbon tax.