

Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme Speech – 3rd reading

Senator FIELDING (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (10.22 am)—Firstly, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is very difficult. Why is it difficult? Because it polarises people. It is divisive and political, but there should be a policy based decision-making process. It is an economic issue and it also is an environmental issue. There are people in Australia that have serious concerns, and those concerns should be looked into before we make any decision in this parliament. Secondly, I believe I am one of the few parliamentarians that have taken an open mind to this whole issue of climate change. I, like many Australians, started out believing that the scientists must be right and that, without a doubt, carbon dioxide must be driving climate change. But people came to me, and my own staff said, ‘Are you sure?’ When I reached the point where I said, ‘I’m not a hundred per cent certain,’ I decided to go on a self-funded trip to the United States to hear both sides of the debate.

When I came back from that trip I brought back with me a couple of key questions that I think the Australian public are also interested in. I engaged with the Rudd government for a week before they decided that they wanted to disengage because they were having trouble answering the questions. It may be an inconvenient fact, but carbon dioxide emissions have been going up rapidly over the last 15 years while the corresponding global air temperatures, on the data that is also used by the IPCC, have not been going up as predicted. Someone has to answer that question, and the Rudd government failed. Those questions are on my website for all to see.

Where are we at? We have time to get it right. There is a growing concern in Australia about rushing ahead. For what benefit? Should we rush ahead and ignore genuine community concerns? When I talk to people on the street, there are three genuine concerns that a lot of them have. One of them is about rushing ahead and committing Australia to targets before we know what the rest of the world is doing. This will clearly put up the cost of doing business in Australia compared to other places. It will also drive down our competitive advantage. It will impose a massive tax on ordinary Australians. For what benefit? Going

alone is risky, and Australians are getting more and more concerned about rushing ahead. That is one issue that many have.

Another issue that others have is in regard to the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme and its costs and benefits compared to any other scheme. That debate has not really even been had. The third concern that many Australians have is about the science and the question that I have just put forward. As more and more people start to grapple with this issue, they want to make sure there is a decent debate about the science and the pros and cons. All too often in this debate someone questioning the science is immediately labelled as a sceptic. How does that help the situation? How does that help to have a genuine debate in Australia?

Senator Barnett—It doesn't.

Senator FIELDING—It does not help whatsoever. They are serious questions. The chart I refer to is simple and contains the data that even the IPCC reference. It is the gold standard for the IPCC. That chart's global air temperatures are the ones that the IPCC use, and over the last 15 years they have not been going up the way they predicted. Surely that deserves a credible discussion, not the discounting of those who raise it by saying, 'You're asking a question; you've got to be a sceptic.' We have to stop that debate and allow people to question.

The next thing the government say is, 'If you feel concerned about rushing ahead and going alone before the rest of the world, you're a sceptic.' Well, there are a lot of sceptics now, because a lot of Australians have that concern about rushing ahead before the rest of the world. Asking questions is part of democracy, so you should not discount and devalue people because they have asked a question. You should engage in a proper process. These three questions have reached a political impasse in parliament. That is the reason why I suggested that we use external, non-political bodies to look at those three issues: to look at whether going it alone is reckless, to look at the costs and benefits of other schemes and also to look at the science behind climate change.

We have time to get it right, and we need to spend that time. If the US rushed and forced a vote in its senate, the vote would be no. This government is forcing the vote deliberately, and this Senate will do the

same thing and vote no. It is reckless to rush ahead when we have three questions. These are very simple questions, but a lot of Australians have one or more of those questions in their mind. It is wrong to rush ahead and not give time to allow those questions to be looked into through a non-political way that can allow Australians to engage in the process rather than through the political theatre of parliament. Quite clearly we have a roadblock, and that is the reason we need to make sure that we get it out of the political system and refer it to non-political bodies.

What is the rush? This deadline is about our Prime Minister going to Copenhagen. It is a political deadline. A policy deadline would say to get the decision-making process right and to look into those three issues and make sure. There are no prizes for going first; Australia will be a loser. That is not right and it is not the fair thing to do. Leaders have called for rigorous scrutiny. It warrants, then, non-political bodies to spend the time to look into those three key questions. Leaders have said this is the most important public policy of our times. We have, then, the time to look into those three core questions. Leaders have claimed it is a risk management issue. A risk management process would say to spend the time on those three core issues.

I do not see what the rush is, because, if you believe what the government is saying, if Australia goes it alone there will be no environmental benefit. You cannot have it both ways. It is risky. Risk management would say to do more homework and not to make sure that we discount people's views by labelling them as sceptics. I think I have proven that I am genuine on this issue. I am happy to be persuaded, but you need to make sure your arguments are strong. The issue that we have here is that it is a massive tax, and if the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme were passed there would be no benefit to the environment as far as what the government is claiming as climate change. The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme look minor.

I believe that we owe it to the Australian people to spend the time. The US has been looking into this issue in their senate over a decade. They have had multiple bills and multiple times they have not got through. Why? Because it is prudent. It is the right, risk-managing thing to do to make sure that we proceed once we have looked into these three core questions. The question about going it alone is what cost there will be to the economy. People are really nervous about this. They are nervous about paying more for

everything. Small businesses, rural and regional areas, mums and dads, pensioners—everybody is going to be slugged, and what the government is not telling you is that there will be no net benefit to what they claim is addressing climate change. They have to come clean.

The second issue is that they seem to want to refuse to consider the costs and benefits of any other scheme. That is reckless. The other issue is the science. For an example, let us have a think about the Waxman-Markey legislation. I raised this issue first on *Lateline*. Waxman and Markey know there is an economic risk to committing to targets, because they had in their legislation a tax on people who do not have the same scheme. They know it puts them at a competitive disadvantage. In the Waxman-Markey legislation there is a so-called 'import tax' on products from countries that do not have the same sort of scheme or targets. The reason is that it will put any economy going it alone at risk.

I urge senators. How can you vote for the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme when so many Australians have questions—questions about going it alone and committing, questions about other schemes and questions about the science? It would be reckless to vote yes for this legislation. I urge the Senate to vote no to this Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.