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News release

Contact Clive Hamilton (02) 6249 6221 (bh) or 0413 993 223 (mob)

Australian Push to Open Huge New Greenhouse Loophole

The Australian Government has called an international ministerial meeting in Perth next week in an attempt to open up a huge loophole in the Kyoto Protocol, according to Australia Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

The potential loophole is provided by a provision in the protocol that may allow countries to count the effects of changes in farming practices towards their emissions reduction obligations. Under the protocol industrialised countries must reduce their emissions by an average of 5.2 per cent below 1990 levels, although Australia extracted a special deal that allows it to increase emissions by 8 per cent by around 2010.

Article 3.4 of the protocol refers to emissions from 'additional activities' and covers a range of agricultural practices including tillage methods, crop rotation, irrigation management, stocking practices and erosion control. Australia is lobbying to be allowed to meet its greenhouse targets through changing farm management practices thus escaping the need to reduce consumption of fossil fuels.

Australia has invited environment ministers from several signatory countries to a three-day closed meeting in Perth starting next Monday.

"The possibilities opened up by these 'additional activities' are vastly greater than the Kyoto negotiators anticipated. International best estimates now indicate that if the loophole is exploit to the maximum it would completely absolve industrialised countries of any need to reduce the growth of emissions from fossil fuels", said Dr Hamilton.

"The Government is schizophrenic on climate change. While Senator Hill has started to talk tough to fossil-fuel polluters, he is at the same time working hard to expand the loopholes in the protocol so that polluters can avoid taking any action", said Dr Hamilton.

"Instead of investing in renewable energy, electricity generators in the Latrobe Valley will be paying farmers in western NSW to change their land management practices", he said. "The whole point of the Kyoto Protocol would be defeated."

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