



Media Release

Announcing the formation of an International Climate Change Taskforce

The Premier of NSW, Mr. Bob Carr, has been invited to join other high-level representatives from around the world to help craft a long-term global response to the threat posed by climate change.

Mr. Carr will serve on the International Climate Change Taskforce. The Taskforce is launched today (Tuesday 16th March) by three of the world's leading think-tanks – the Australia Institute in Canberra, the Institute for Public Policy Research in London, and the Center for American Progress in Washington DC.

The initiative brings together leaders in politics, environment, business and science from Australia, the US, Europe and the developing world.

The geographic representation of the taskforce reflects the desire to bring the two countries that have rejected the Kyoto Protocol, the US and Australia, back into the multilateral process. It also reflects the need for full engagement and support from developing and continental European countries.

“Over time climate change will affect everyone in NSW,” said Mr. Carr. “My position on this is clear - I firmly believe Australia should ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the Advisory Committee I appointed last year confirmed that ratification is in Australia's economic interests, and my Government is proceeding with policies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the State. However climate change is a global phenomenon that requires a global response, and that's why I'm very pleased to be part of this high level global initiative that seeks to identify a framework for action beyond the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.”

In a unique international cross-party collaboration, the taskforce will be co-chaired by British Labour MP Stephen Byers and US Republican Senator Olympia Snowe.

Announcing the taskforce, Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers MP, said:

“We have a responsibility to future generations to hand to them a planet that is habitable and as rich in life as it is today. Climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities threatens that objective. It is

clear that tackling this problem is the overriding environmental challenge of our age.

“The Kyoto Protocol was a milestone for the international community in taking the first step to address the danger which climate change poses. The taskforce will help safeguard and build on Kyoto by identifying new ways to secure international co-operation and support. For the future, we need to find the means by which we can involve those countries that have not ratified or are not bound by Kyoto, so that climate change can be dealt with effectively over the long term.

“This will be a major challenge but it is one that the taskforce is confident it can meet.”

The Taskforce's recommendations will be delivered early in 2005 and will be aimed at all governments in the international negotiations with special emphasis on the United Kingdom (UK), who will hold the Presidency of the G8 and the European Union in 2005.

The Australian members of the taskforce include Mr Carr, Ms Cathy Zoi, former head of the NSW Sustainable Energy Development Authority, and Professor Tony McMichael, one of the world's leading experts on the human health impacts of global warming who is based at the Australian National University.

International members include Dr R K Pachauri, Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change which advises the United Nations, Mr Tim Wirth, former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs in the Clinton Administration, US Republican Senator Olympia Snowe, Mr Adair Turner, Vice President of Merrill Lynch Europe, and Sir Jonathon Porritt, Chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

“The year 2005 will be a critical one for international negotiations on climate change, and it is vital that Australia makes a constructive contribution to this new phase of the debate”, said Dr Clive Hamilton, Executive Director of The Australia Institute.

The Taskforce will hold its first meeting on 22nd March 2004 in Windsor, near London. It is expected to hold two or three sessions by videoconference, before a second face-to-face meeting in mid-November 2004 in Washington DC or Sydney, Australia. At this final meeting, the Taskforce is expected to reach a consensus on a set of proposals. These will be set forth in a report, to be published in early 2005, which will be presented to Prime Minister Tony Blair and representatives of other governments worldwide.

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Background Paper

Announcing the formation of an International Climate Change Taskforce

The Australia Institute in Canberra has joined forces with the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), and the Center for American Progress (CAP) in Washington DC to establish a high-level International Taskforce on Climate Change. The initiative brings together leaders from politics, business, civil society and science from around the world. Its purpose is to develop proposals aimed at conserving the gains made on climate change at the international level through the Kyoto Protocol, and building on them to help ensure climate change is addressed effectively over the long term. These recommendations will be aimed at all governments, with special emphasis on the UK.

Background

"Climate change is the most severe problem we are facing today," according to Sir David King, the UK government's chief scientific adviser. The most recent scientific research on climate change leaves us in no doubt as to the scale of the problem.

- ❑ Global emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main heat-trapping or greenhouse gas, produced by burning coal, oil and gas, have grown 12-fold over the course of the last century. As CO₂ stays and accumulates in the atmosphere for many decades, CO₂ concentrations have risen by a third over pre-industrial levels.
- ❑ Physical observations confirm that the planet has been warming. The 1990s were the warmest decade since written records began. The planet's snow cover has decreased by 10% and the extent of arctic sea-ice has decreased by 15% in spring and summer since the 1950s; and there has been a world-wide retreat of glaciers.
- ❑ Other climatic changes include a 10-15% increase in rainfall and a doubling of stormy weather in parts of the Northern Hemisphere since the 1950s; and global average sea levels have risen by up to 0.2 metres during the 20th century.
- ❑ Climate change is already killing about 150,000 people a year, according to the World Health Organisation, through heat-waves, floods, storms and droughts, and the spread of water-borne diseases and those carried by insects.
- ❑ Economic losses from natural disasters (about 80 percent of which were weather-related) have increased nine-fold since the 1960s to \$480 billion in the 1990s, according to the German re-insurer Munich Re.

- ❑ Climate change is also already damaging ecosystems, such as the world's coral reefs, large stretches of which have been killed by warming oceans. Climate change is predicted to drive a million of the world's species to extinction as soon as 2050, according to a study published in the journal *Nature*.
- ❑ Global average temperatures are predicted to rise by up to 6°C by the end of the century if little is done to reduce emissions, and sea levels are projected to rise by almost a metre, flooding low-lying islands, cropland and certain cities world-wide.

These impacts are expected to become more severe if emissions continue to grow. The challenge is to ensure that greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere do not rise to levels where the impact on climate becomes catastrophic. The effort to meet this challenge will be long-lasting but must be pursued in earnest now.

At the same time, there is a need for poorer nations to develop their economies and for developed nations to continue to grow their own. But such economic growth must increasingly be fuelled through cleaner, more sustainable means that dramatically reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

The world has already begun to address these challenges through the Kyoto Protocol, which was negotiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Protocol is designed to begin the process of making the economic transition towards a lower-carbon pathway. But the Protocol is not yet operational, owing to the non-participation of several key countries, and was designed as a first step applying to the years 2008-2012, and focuses largely on the developed world.

It is imperative that the nations of the world ensure that the gains of the Kyoto Protocol are preserved and built on in the next stage of the global fight against climate change, in order to move the world more decisively down the low carbon pathway, once the first commitment phase of the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. International negotiations on the design of this second stage are scheduled to begin in 2005.

International Taskforce

With this in mind, the Australia Institute together with the IPPR and CAP has established the International Climate Change Taskforce. Members of the taskforce have been chosen for their expertise, creativity and political influence. The geographic representation of the taskforce reflects the need for engagement and support from major European and developing countries, and the desire to bring the two countries that have rejected the Kyoto Protocol, the US and Australia, back into the multilateral process.

The Taskforce will hold its first meeting beginning on 22nd March 2004 near London. It is expected to hold two or three sessions by video-conference, before a second face-to-face meeting in mid-November 2004 in Washington DC or Sydney, Australia. At this final meeting, taskforce members will be expected to reach a consensus on a set of proposals.

The Taskforce's recommendations will be published in a report early in 2005 and will be aimed at all governments in the international negotiations, with special emphasis on the United Kingdom (UK). The UK will hold the Presidencies of the G8 and the European Union in 2005 and Prime Minister Tony Blair has already pledged to make progress on climate change a top priority. The UK will thus be uniquely positioned to leverage support for multilateral action on climate change just when the next stage of negotiations is set to begin.

The deliberations and decisions taken by taskforce members will be informed throughout by input from NGO, governmental, scientific and academic experts from developed and developing countries. This will take the form of briefing papers and seminars, and a substantial research programme which taskforce members will debate and commission at their first meeting.

International Climate Change Taskforce Members

From politics and government

- Rt. Hon. Stephen Byers MP: former Secretary of State for Trade & Industry and for Transport, Local Government & the Regions (UK). (*Taskforce Chairman*).
- Hon. Bob Carr (Labor): Premier of New South Wales (Australia).
- Ms Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet: Member of the National Assembly, responsible for Health & Environment portfolios within governing UMP party, and former environment advisor to Prime Minister Raffarin and President Chirac (France).
- Dr Jose Domingos Gonzalez Miguez: Executive Secretary of the Interministerial Commission on Climate Change (Brazil)
- Senator Olympia Snowe (Republican): Member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation (USA)
- Dr Ernst von Weizsäcker: member of the German Bundestag (for the governing Social Democratic Party). Chairman of the Bundestag's Environment Committee. Former President of the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy.

From science and academia

- Professor John Holdren, Professor of the Science and Politics of Climate Change at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government (USA).
- Professor Tony McMichael: Director of the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) at the Australian National University (Australia).
- Dr R K Pachauri: Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Director General of the Energy and Resources Institute (India).
- Professor Ni Weidou, Director of the Clean Energy Centre at Tsinghua University, Beijing (China).

From business

- Mr Adair Turner: Vice-President of Merrill Lynch Europe and former Director General of the Confederation of British Industry (UK).
- Ms Cathy Zoi: Group Executive Director of Bayard Capital, former Executive Director of the Sustainable Development Energy Authority of New South Wales (Australia).

From non-governmental organisations

- Dr Martin Khor, Director of the Third World Network (Malaysia).
- Dr Claude Martin, Director General of WWF International (Switzerland).
- Sir Jonathan Porritt: Co-Founder and Programme Director of Forum for the Future and Chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission (UK).
- Mr Tim Wirth: President of the UN Foundation, former Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs under President Clinton, former Senator (Democrat). (USA).