

Power Without Reason

[Food & Environment](#) | [Alan Moran](#)

Herald Sun 1st June, 2002



The Kyoto climate control agreement is back in the news. Under this agreement, countries tentatively agreed to limit emissions of greenhouse gases (mainly carbon dioxide). The aim is to combat a forecast man-induced trend to increased global temperatures.

But, even if there is a global warming trend, full implementation of the Kyoto agreement would have only a trivial effect on the build-up of global CO₂ levels. And if increased CO₂ do mean higher temperatures, Kyoto would put back a forecast 2 °C rise in global temperature from 2100 (under business-as-usual) to 2104.

The pain in achieving even the apparently modest Kyoto goal is now being seen across a great many nations. In Australia's case, it involves limiting carbon dioxide emission increases to 8 per cent above the 1990 levels by 2010. This is unattainable given that our present output is 23 per cent above the 1990 level.

Australia's approach to Kyoto involves fostering exotic sorts of power, wind being the most important. The Commonwealth has penalties to ensure that about 1 per cent of electricity by 2010 will come from these new sources. The penalties mean a doubling of costs compared with conventional power.

There are suggestions that the efficiency of wind and other exotics will increase over time. Doubtless this is true, but it is also true of other forms of power. Over recent years, there has been little or no narrowing of the relative cost of wind and coal. Moreover, when the wind is blowing, which is 30 per cent of the time at best, modern windmills already draw 45 per cent of the available energy from wind. The theoretical maximum is 59 per cent.

There has been a rapid increase in new installations of wind generators across the world. In all cases, this has been on the back of hefty subsidies.

Denmark has been the stand-out case with, on some estimates, up to 17 per cent of its electricity coming from wind. But this is likely to be pared back by a new government keen to address electricity costs which, as a result of the windmill policy, are three times the Australian level.

Germany and the US are other major users, with wind supplying about 1.5 per cent of Germany's electricity and 0.13 per cent in the US.

If unconventional electricity supplied the targeted 1 per cent of total electricity in Australia by 2010 the cost would be considerable. It would mean an annual tax on energy amounting to \$380 million, with the funds largely diverted to high-cost, mainly wind, solutions.

Each additional percentage point would require another \$380 million per annum. Moreover, these sums do not take into account the further costs that are required to manage the low quality of wind and some other exotic renewable energy sources.

Environmentalists are fond of saying, 'If nuclear is the answer (to combating global warming), we are asking the wrong question'. But wind and other exotic sources can only provide answers at very high costs. We should, therefore make sure that the question we are asking is addressing a real problem.

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