



Prize Winner

Science Writing

Year 5-6

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Climate Change; The Way Forward?

Politics and the Planet

Let's agree, climate change is a result of human activity.

By studying glaciers and nature, scientists know our planet has experienced different climates during its history, but the global temperatures are increasing faster than ever before, rising 0.85°C since 1880. This is a direct result of increased greenhouse gases in our atmosphere caused by:

- Burning fossil fuels which release carbon dioxide. Levels now are 41% higher than pre-Industrial Revolution times.
- Methane released by living organisms (farmed and from waste treatment).
- Deforestation means less carbon dioxide being removed from the atmosphere.

It's important for us as individuals to take responsibility to stop climate change, but ultimately government action will result in more significant improvements through legislation and incentives.

We're already seeing the results of global warming:

- Rising sea levels from:
 - Water temperature (warm water takes up more space than cold water).
 - Melting ice caps and glaciers.
- Changing ocean currents change weather patterns.
- Extreme weather events.

It seems obvious that Governments should take action. These problems will impact every country.

- People relocating from coastal areas.
- Fresh water supplies polluted by salt water.
- More droughts and floods.
- A decreased ability to produce food and an overall decrease in the area available to produce food.
- Damage to city infrastructures.
- Extreme weather events costing money to repair and recover from.
- Climate change refugees will put economic pressure on countries.

But who monitors the Governments? Australia is a member of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which was created to try stabilising greenhouse gas emissions. However, the UNFCCC aren't forcing governments to address climate change. Their position is it only becomes a policy issue if human activity is having a "dangerous" influence on climate. What's "dangerous"? Have we already passed a point where the survival of humanity is threatened?

This means it's up to each country's government to act for climate change, by their own choice.

The aim of any political party is to get elected. Our two major parties' have very different approaches to climate change. The Australian Labor Party has an aggressive plan that will have Australia carbon neutral by 2050. The Liberal Party of Australia aim only to meet, and sometimes exceed, the goals set as part of the UNFCCC principles.

As the Liberal Party are currently in power, it seems Australian people aren't voting based on environmental issues and politicians aren't prioritising climate change policy. Why?

Public Thinking

Part of the problem could be human nature. One article stated the reasons our people and leaders don't see climate change as a critical issue is because:

- **Complexity:** the issue is so big, people get overwhelmed by it.
- **Unintentional Nature of the Problem:** climate change is an unexpected consequence of economic growth and so isn't as bad as if the damage was on purpose.
- **Guilt:** people feel guilty because of their contribution so they downplay the importance of the issue.
- **Optimism:** when people are not certain or clear about the problem they tend to have the attitude "it'll be fine".
- **Politics:** we follow what the government says.
- **It's in the future and it's far away.**
("It's Getting Hot in Here". Bridget Heos)

Length of Elected Term

Each term is four years. During this time parties want to show measurable results so the public is more likely to re-elect them. Even if we stabilise greenhouse gasses in our atmosphere, it's only a hope that we haven't dangerously affected our planet and it will take many years to see how the environment responds. The UNFCCC's principals are not legally binding. They don't specify a time frame past 2030 meaning our government is not obligated to achieve any improvement within their current term.

Fear of Economic Damage

Governments are scared of damaging our major industries (mining, farming, tourism) that produce greenhouse gasses. A lot of these industries have contributed to our country's economic growth. They don't want to lose the support of these organisations. Also their financial contribution is important to the political parties and the economy. Government also tries to minimise the impact to our way of life and don't want to negatively impact our cost of living. This means the Government does not want to introduce major changes to fix climate change.

In conclusion, we need to take drastic action before global warming becomes a bigger problem which we can't recover from. We need our government to take the lead and make everyone responsible for fixing the problem. They need to listen to scientists and switch to renewable energy and consider other energy sources. Governments need to stop focussing on the potential cost and start thinking about opportunities that developing new ideas might bring.

As a nation, we need show to the Government that we want to see significant change that will benefit the environment and stop climate change.

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