

## THE CURSE OF THE SURROGATE GOAL

We see this problem raise itself repeatedly in western societies. Consequently, although I distrust the Greens, I do not believe the Greens deliberately set out to misuse surrogate goals. However, they do misuse surrogate goals, which helps them, but costs us dearly. In future, we need to avoid this problem with any issue sponsored by the Greens.

If we are attempting to prevent road deaths and we believe that on a particular stretch of road excessive speed is causing road deaths, then we may use “the reduction of excessive speed” as a surrogate goal. By concentrating on this surrogate goal, we are confident that we will also achieve our primary goal of “reducing road deaths”. Therefore, we might spend time, effort, and money, bringing in legislation, regulations, and rules to allow the policing of a reduced speed limit. Speed signs are put up, speed cameras are installed, and education campaigns are run. The use of a surrogate goal is very powerful **if, and only if**, excessive speed does reduce road deaths on this road. Unfortunately, because we expend so much effort on focussing on the surrogate goal, there is a tendency to lose focus on our primary goal.

If there is a failure in our logic for solving this problem and, on this particular stretch of road, excessive speed is not causing the road deaths but some other factor, then losing sight of our primary goal can be damaging in two ways. First, we are doing nothing effective to overcome the real problem, and road deaths will continue to occur. Second, all the time, effort, and money spent on deterring speeding have been wasted because we are not achieving our primary goal. The longer this goes on, the greater is the damage. Whenever we use a surrogate goal, we must continue to measure the impact of our efforts on our primary goal.

This lack of focus occurred in the 1960s when Rachel Carson’s campaign against industrial chemicals resulted in the Greens and politicians over-focussing on a surrogate goal – reducing industrial pollution. While trying to protect birdlife and reduce cancer rates, years of effort and money was spent identifying what chemicals needed to be controlled, what industries used these chemicals, the standards of pollution that would be allowed, and then creating and implementing all the mechanisms that were needed to enforce these new regulations. The focus on the primary goal was lost. What was needed was an army of ‘dead bird’ and ‘cancer rate’ counters. With this focus on the primary goal, it would have become obvious very quickly that there was a lack of dead birds, or no increase in cancer rates, and that industrial chemicals were not causing all the birds, or people, to die. Instead, years of time, effort and money were wasted chasing an inappropriate surrogate goal.

Similarly, there were no “dead forest” counters during the acid rain campaign, and once again, billions were wasted. That money could have been spent on a

myriad of other real problems. If you look at the history of our society responding to the Green's concerns, you will find that most of the time, if not all the time, we have fallen for 'the curse of the surrogate goal'. Even now, we are doing it again with their global warming campaign.

The surrogate goal in the global warming campaign is "the reduction of carbon emissions". You only have to glance at the daily newspapers to see the time, effort and money being spent on setting up emission trading schemes and other systems to reduce the dreaded "carbon footprint". Can anyone out there hear the patter of the feet of those "counting" the global warming which, in itself, is a surrogate measure for the largely unidentified and ill-defined catastrophic events we are trying to avoid?

The lack of focus on the primary goal might explain the lack of comment about global warming stopping in 1998 – thirteen years ago. This cessation should have rung warning bells. More importantly, stopping global warming per se is not our primary goal. Our primary goal is preventing those catastrophic events that we believe might occur with global warming. No one is focussing on measuring those events in any objective way; in contrast with the overuse of anecdotal stories about such suspected events. Once again, that might explain the absence of comments about the lack of evidence of such events occurring in the past twenty years.

I believe there is clear evidence today that the logic in our problem solving of global warming is awry. I would be consoled if people were discussing the lack of warming and deciding that it was too early to conclude that global warming had stopped. Instead, all I hear is a deathly silence while the Green propaganda campaign does its best to distract people from these obvious warning bells. We should remember the Greens will not help us, as they are not interested in whether or not these events occur, and are only interested in changing the ways of "wicked industrial man" at whatever cost it will take.