

## ANOTHER EMPTY KYOTO PROTOCOL

**TACKLING global warming, we are often told, is the defining task of our age. An army of pundits tells us that we need to cut emissions, and cut them immediately and drastically. But this argument is clearly losing the battle for hearts and minds.**

Global warming has become the lowest-priority policy problem among Americans, according to a new Pew survey. Another Pew survey shows that China, the biggest emitter, cares even less. Just 24 per cent of Chinese regard global warming as a very serious problem, making China the least concerned country.

In Britain, an Opinium survey shows most voters think green taxes are mainly for raising cash rather than saving the environment, and seven out of 10 are not willing to pay more taxes to combat climate change.

At the same time, the proposed solutions for the problem of global warming have been awful. In Rio de Janeiro in 1992, politicians from wealthy countries promised to cut emissions by 2000 but did no such thing.

Leaders met again in Kyoto in 1997 and promised even stricter carbon cuts by 2010, yet emissions keep increasing and Kyoto has done virtually nothing to change that.

What is most tragic is that when leaders meet in Copenhagen this December, they will embrace more of the same solution: promises of even more drastic emission reductions that, once again, are unlikely to be fulfilled.

Measures that consistently over-promise and underachieve at vast cost do not win hearts and minds in the best of times, and this is manifestly not the best of times.

Fortunately, we have a much better option with a much better chance of success. We should make low-carbon energy sources such as solar power become a real, competitive alternative to old energy sources instead of the preserve of rich people who want to feel greener.

We should therefore invest on an effective scale in inventing new technology. Contrary to what one may imagine, the Kyoto Protocol has not prompted this research.

Indeed, research investment has plummeted since the 1980s and has not improved since, even among Kyoto-participating countries.

Investing heavily in research and development of low-carbon energy, solar power, or other new technologies, would become cheaper than fossil fuels much more quickly. Economic estimates show that for every \$1 spent, we would do \$16 worth of good.

Every country should agree to spend 0.05 per cent of its gross domestic product on low-carbon energy R&D. The total global cost would be 15 times higher than

present spending on alternative energy research, yet six times lower than the cost of Kyoto. An agreement of this nature could be the new Kyoto treaty for the world, the principal difference being that this protocol would make a difference and stand a good chance of global acceptance. Why not do both: invest in R&D but still promise to cut carbon emissions now?

Kyoto-style policies can be only an expensive distraction from the real business of weaning us off fossil fuels.

There are two fundamental reasons a focus on reducing carbon emissions is the wrong response to global warming.

First, using fossil fuels remains the only way out of poverty for developing countries. Coal provides half of the world's energy. In China and India, it accounts for about 80 per cent of power generation and is helping labourers in those countries enjoy a quality of life that their parents could barely imagine.

Capping emissions means, effectively, ending this success story for hundreds of millions of people.

There is no green energy source that is affordable enough to replace coal in the near future.

Instead, our increased research will make green energy cheaper than fossil fuels by mid-century.

Second, immediate carbon cuts are expensive and the cost significantly outweighs the benefits. If the Kyoto agreement had been fully implemented throughout this century, it would have cut temperatures by only an insignificant 0.2C, at a cost of \$180 billion every year. In economic terms, Kyoto does only about 30c worth of good for each dollar spent.

Deeper emissions cuts such as those proposed by the European Union - 20per cent below 1990 levels within 12 years - would reduce global temperatures by only 1/60th of 1C by 2100, at a cost of \$10 trillion.

For every dollar spent, we would do just 4c worth of good.

The saddest thing about the global warming debate is that nearly all of the protagonists - politicians, campaigners and pundits - know that the old-style agreement that is on the table for Copenhagen will have a negligible effect on temperatures. Unless we change direction and make our actions realistic and achievable, it is already clear that the declarations of success in Copenhagen will be meaningless.

We will make promises. We will not keep them. And we will waste another decade. Instead, we must challenge the orthodoxy of Kyoto. We can do better.

**The Australian, Opinion, Bjorn Lomborg May 14, 2009** *Bjorn Lomborg is an adjunct professor at the Copenhagen Business School.*