

Transcript from APPEC Public Forum Sydney, September 1 2007

Don Henry

Executive Director, Australian Conservation Foundation

'APEC and Climate Change'

Thank you very much, Hi my name is Don, I 'm from Queensland and I am used to wearing shirts like this, thank you to the shirt maker. Can I acknowledge the owners of the traditional land on whose land we're meeting her tonight and can I also congratulate everyone who has worked hard tonight, the supporting organizations and to everyone who has hung out tonight, thank you very much for your passion and commitment on these issues. It's great to be stimulating a stronger discussion about Human Rights, Labour rights and environment rights around APEC. This is no ordinary APEC meeting, the world has woken to the extent and challenge of the climate crisis. People and nations everywhere want urgent action to ensure that our children don't face dangerous climate change in their lives. Even yesterday the Lowy Institute released a poll that surveyed Australian's views on foreign policy and on climate change the polling said this, of all external threats to Australians, Climate Change causes the most concern, with 55% of Australians very worried about it as an external threat.

Climate Change ranks higher than the threats of unfriendly countries developing nuclear weapons. That is 50% are very worried about it. Islamic fundamentalism, 39% very worried about it and International Terrorism, 38% very worried about it.

As a foreign policy goal, tackling Climate Change ranked equal highest of importance for those surveyed. 75% think it was a very important policy goal for Australia together with protecting the jobs of Australian workers and ahead of combating International Terrorism once again. So that was yesterday and that was Australians speaking up. It is not only an issue here at home, it's a really big international foreign policy issue for us and those views are being echoed around the world. If you look at people in China, Latin America, North America, Indonesia, the publics around the world are saying we've got a crisis and we need to act.

So the world has woken up to the threat of dangerous climate change but the question that has got to be answered over the next week is whether APEC has woken up to its abiding and compelling responsibility to act. Now why is this a crisis, forgive me for going over a little bit of information, but I think that this is important. Earlier this year, we saw the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) release three important reports. Now this is over 2000 of the worlds leading climate scientists who come together every 4 years to analyze the science. They in essence peer review the peer reviewed science, they then present it to governments and it's ticked off by all the governments of the world so it's got to go through the normal science process. It's then got to be peer reviewed by these 2000 scientists and then it's got to be approved by

every government around the world including President Bush. So you can bet your boots it's not out on the radical end of things, this is quite conservative science. Now we've probably all heard about the predictions for Australia, but just a couple of reminders for us, for Australia and New Zealand on why this is a crisis for us. This conservative scientists report, says, "as a result of reduced precipitation and increased evaporation, water security problems are projected to intensify by 2030 in Southern and Eastern Australia where we are now and in New Zealand. They say the Great Barrier Reef is at risk, the Queensland and wet tropical rainforests are at risk, Kakadu wetlands are at risk, the wildflower regions of south west and western Australia are at risk, our South Atlantic Islands and our alpine areas in both countries are at risk.

They also say that for example, production from agriculture by 2030 is projected to decline over much of Southern and Eastern Australia and over parts of Eastern New Zealand, due to increased drought and fire. So here's an economic issue sitting in there as well and I think we all know the data there that here in Australia, our environments are at risk, our well-being is at risk with water supply, our health is at risk and our economy is at risk. Now let me just look at what a couple of the other APEC regions are facing. Why is the climate crisis so important to Asia. So here's just a few snapshots of the IPCC impacts report on the climate risk to Asia, quote, "New evidence now shows that climate change has already effected many sectors in Asia. The crop yield in many countries of Asia has declined partly due to rising temperatures and extreme weather events. The retreat of glaciers and permafrost across Asia, for example from the Himalaya, in recent years is unprecedented as a consequence of warming. The frequency and occurrence climate induced diseases and heat stress in Central, East, South and South East Asia has increased with the rising temperatures and rainfall variability. Just a couple of details from this conservative scientific report for Asia if we don't act to tackle climate change, Asia is facing a 10% decrease in crop yield for parts of Asia by 2020, a 10% decrease in crop yield. Fresh water availability in Central, South East and South Asia is likely to decrease due to climate change and that this could adversely affect more than a billion people in Asia by the 2050. Don't forget the Himalaya is the water shed for billions of people throughout East, South East and South Asia.

They say 1.2 billion people will experience increased water stress, if we don't act to tackle climate change and they also say an additional 49 million people could be at risk of hunger by 2020, because of climate induced impacts on crops. They go on to say this, projected sea level rise is very likely to result in significant losses of coastal eco-systems and millions of people along the coasts of South and South East Asia will likely be at risk from flooding. These are serious impacts in this region if we don't act to tackle climate change.

My last snap shot for an APEC region, the IPCC says North America has experienced locally severe economic damage plus substantial eco-system, social and cultural disruption from recent weather related extremes, including hurricanes; don't mention

Katrina, other severe storms, floods, droughts, heat waves and wild fires. Annual costs to North America have now reached tens of billions of dollars in damaged property and economic productivity as well as lives disrupted and lost. If we don't act to tackle climate change Northern American coastal communities and habitats will be increasingly stressed by climate change impacts interacting with development and pollution. Climate change will constrain North America's already over allocated water resources. For example in the great lakes and major river systems, lower levels are likely to exacerbate challenges relating to water quality, navigation, recreation, hydro power generation, water transfers and bi-national relationships, that's a rather cute phrase about Canada and the US getting a wee bit stropky with each other. Their serious issues that if we don't act to tackle climate change in Northern America.

From these few snap shots from this conservative report, you can see that climate change is an environmental crisis for APEC countries. You can see that climate change is a health and social crisis for APEC countries. You can see that it is also an economic crisis of huge proportions for APEC countries. Time is running out. The chief scientist of NASA, Hansen two years ago said we've got 10 years to seriously turn things around, there's 8 years left. Time is running out. I like to say on the positive side, we're the privileged generation that still has the opportunity to ensure our kids don't cop dangerous climate change, they won't have that opportunity, think about that.

APEC will stand or fall on its response this coming week to the climate crisis. Well what are the tests we should look to judge successful APEC action on climate change? I just want to mention in brief, Melville has done a wonderful job in covering the bases very very well there. Firstly show international leadership by ensuring all countries in APEC have ratified the Kyoto Protocol. Help me with a question here, what have China, Japan, Canada and Indonesia all got in common, they have all ratified the Kyoto protocol. Now you know the only two developed countries in APEC that haven't, the US and Australia. Now what does this actually mean just very quickly, for those countries that have ratified, for the developed countries, for example Japan, we're seeing targets to reduce emissions, we're seeing boosting of renewable energy, we're seeing boosting of energy efficiency in the nation. For developing countries like China, we're seeing China through the clean development mechanism and emissions trading piece of the Kyoto Protocol, we're seeing China trade billions of dollars to gain cleaner technologies, to start cleaning up their economy. Nearly 98% of the 25 billion dollar global carbon market is tied up in projects supported by the Kyoto Protocol's flexibility mechanisms. The clean development mechanism and joint implementation. So let's ratify Kyoto. Secondly we need to ensure that we have immediate and large scale investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency. A meaningful statement on climate change will commit to driving large scale public and private investment in the use of safe, clean renewable energy and more efficient energy use in all APEC countries. Thirdly, set firm targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The time for aspirational targets is over, they failed in the early 1990's, that's why we've got the Kyoto protocol. We need firm targets, Melville's canvassed them, globally we must reduce emissions by at least 50%

it's probably going to need to be 60%, at least 50% below 1990 levels by 2050 to reduce to a 1 in 4 chance, the risk of exceeding 2 degrees. I'd like better odds than that I'm sure everyone in this room would and in the middle of this year we saw the G8 say they'd seriously look at this. APEC must commit to that third one. Beyond that developed countries have a special responsibility, because we've created most of the pollution and greenhouse emissions. On average the carbon cycle may stay in the atmosphere for 80 years and so developed countries need to achieve cuts of 80 -90% of our 1990 levels by 2050, and we need to achieve cuts of 30% by 2020. We should be looking for the developed countries at APEC to make these commitments.

Now there are three key tests, Kyoto, renewable energy and energy efficiency and targets for reducing emissions. There may additionally be two other points that are discussed and I want to raise them. APEC risks being side tracked by pro-nuclear initiatives, in our view, here's some risks, we may see Prime Minister Howard use APEC to promote the proposed Australia India Nuclear Cooperation and Uranium exports agreements, in our view, wrong way go back. We may see our Prime Minister commit to support President Bush's US India Nuclear deal, wrong way go back. We may see efforts to sign a uranium export agreement with Russian leader Vladimir Putin, wrong way go back and we may see efforts to sign up to parts of the US global nuclear energy partnership which is attempting to develop cooperation on so called generation for nuclear reactors. Australians won't have a bar of it, nuclear power and the whole nuclear cycle is too slow, too dirty and too dangerous.

The other additional point I wanted to make was that there may be discussion on avoided deforestation. It's absolutely right that the clearing particularly of the tropical rainforests, currently accounts for about 20% of greenhouse emissions globally, it's a very serious issue we need action to avoid deforestation, but there are some things we have got to do at home here we can't just talk. We need to ban timber imports that can't be verified as legal and logged sustainably. We need to lead by example by ending the logging and burning of our own old growth forests and I think that penny has dropped.

Well what has been the role of APEC and APEC countries on climate change? APEC has been really weak on this issue and slow to the table, but a whole range of APEC countries are making serious progress and I have touched on some of that and acknowledged that before. There are two APEC countries, Australia and the US who have tried in the last 6 years to undermine and frustrate action on Kyoto ratification, binding targets to reduce emissions and serious trade in renewable energy, renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency. Where is our moral leadership? Why would China act to set binding targets to reduce emissions when wealthy countries such as Australia and the US have been making an art form out of dodging and weaving? We the people should not put up with this. Where is our common sense, our beautiful countries are at risk, The Great Barrier Reef, the Yosemite National Park, they are at risk, it's our own countries future that we are compromising.

Where is our enlightened self interest? Our economies are at serious risk with climate change and we need our neighbours and our colleague APEC countries to be active. Look at the missed opportunities to benefit from cleaner greener economies and developing jobs in those arenas. It's just not good enough. Just before I conclude for those that are interested if you want to do a couple of neat things personally, two websites I want to suggest to you, "Big Switch" which will give you a whole lot of rich data on what to do and helps you take action and also "Who on earth cares," which we just recently launched with Cate Blanchett which is a very simplified version of that, there's two websites that can help you take action, tell your friends about it. Let's get cracking.

Let me conclude by focusing on one crucial point, this will probably be one of the last APEC meetings that US President George Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard will attend. It will be one of their last. What is the one thing that President Bush and Prime Minister Howard could do that would bring Australians and Americans together in partnership with our APEC colleagues to tackle climate change, this great challenge of our time.

What is the one tangible thing Australia and the US could do to make a big difference today. Prime Minister Howard use your special relationship with President Bush bring our two fine countries in from the cold and position us for leadership to avoid dangerous climate change and to build a clean and just future for the sake of the children of the world. This one tangible thing relates to the Kyoto Protocol and I'll say it in three ways. Ratify, ratify, ratify. Thank you.