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**Comments on the**  
**“Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation”**  
**Draft Report**  
**by Richard Weller**

20120705

I would like to submit the following comments on the Draft Report:-

**General**

It is imperative that Australia increases its resilience rapidly as the impacts of climate change are accelerating and already being felt across the country. This report is welcomed as a building block to assist policy makers to respond to this crisis.

Removal of barriers to adaptation (and also to mitigation) is critical if Australia is to continue to be one of the leading civilized nations of the world. Disruption due to the impacts of such changes as increasing heat, rising sea levels, dropping rainfall averages and increasing storm intensity is likely to be serious regardless of the level of preparation. What preparation (such as increasing our adaptive resilience) can do is make it easier for people during the recovery phase.

**Detailed**

1. The biggest barrier to adaptation to climate change is the lack of education of the public about the changes they can expect. The general lack of knowledge has led to the influence of those who would delay and avoid facing the problem being able to create doubt in the minds of many people. The urgency of the problem demands that we greatly improve the understanding of the community of the basic science and the impacts that arise from it. A raft of measures could be used to improve the level of understanding of the public.
  - a. Direct education of the public through public lectures and education programs

- b. Increased education of school children on the basic science
  - c. Collecting more information on the expected changes and making it a priority to provide this information to the public. Better information on the impacts of sea level rise could include:- accurate mapping of the land surface along our coastlines and estuaries; establishing the floor levels of properties where the land was at threat of flooding; investigating coastal erosion for vulnerable locations; time based studies of changes in coastal recession rates
  - d.
2. Government tax breaks, subsidies and regulations that support the fossil fuel industries are a barrier to increased adaptation simply due to the working of one part of government against the other. Supporting such parts of outdated industry sends the wrong message to the community and in particular to those who need to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Removal of these measures acknowledges the serious nature of the situation and allows the community to accept that climate change is happening. This would encourage wiser decisions to be made when communities are considering adopting adaptation measures.
  3. Engineering measures such as that carried out by Brisbane Airport are not enough. Better would be consideration that the airport is in the wrong location and needs to be moved in time. The lifetime of Brisbane Airport was set to a limit as soon as it was understood that sea level will rise. Be it 100 years or 150 years, it will eventually need to be moved. Such long term planning needs to be tackled in order to increase adaptive resilience in the community.
  4. Incorporation of trigger events into development approvals is a must. For example, approval might be given for development of a property such that when sea level rise reaches a certain height and a certain rate of rise no additional development of the property is allowed. Such conditions may not occur for the property for a number of decades, or if sea level rise accelerates the conditions may be reached earlier. Such a mechanism limits the vulnerability of the development to a manageable level and at the same time provides a reasonable limit at which all could agree the property is at risk. It would allow for a property to be developed in the understanding that it has a limited lifetime directly related to the risk of sea level rise.
  5. It is not agreed that the costs and benefits of adaptation are largely private. Government was set up to organize and protect the community. Government is required to take responsibility for large scale change and impact on the community. For example, the largest impacts on the community of a war are largely private (loss of life and property). Yet one of the main responsibilities of government is to determine foreign policy for the express purpose of avoiding war. This is due to the scale of the problem and the need to organize 'en-mass'. Climate change has the same scale of change as a major war (or greater). Therefore, it is wrong to say the costs and benefits of climate change adaptation are largely the responsibility of the private sector. The scale of the climate emergency requires a whole of government response.
  6. One point about the scale of climate change that must be made is:- The impacts are large enough that all individuals will be affected. No-one should be left without assistance. This is a fundamental principle of the egalitarian society of which we as Australian's claim to be a great example. One major pillar of adaptation will be that those hit hardest should be provided

assistance. For example, we need to find a way to assist those who will be caught with waterfront property and find themselves unable to protect it.

7. The caution over uncertainty regarding the impacts of climate change into the future is unwarranted. The uncertainties are mostly in the upward (towards worse) direction. Particularly in the light of the lack of concerted action in the international sphere and the tendency for humanity to be characteristically greedy. It is almost a certainty that international action to reduce GHG emissions will be too little too late. Therefore, it is highly likely we will see more than 2 degrees rise in temperature with high potential for much worse. It is probable that we will see more rise in sea level than is currently projected. It is probable that we will see Queensland deserts encroach on our S.E. Aust farmlands. It is probable that heat waves will become far worse. We cannot risk taking the line that 'uncertainty' could make climate change less than expected. The potential impacts are simply too great for us to take without proper preparation. We must prepare to adapt and do it soon and aggressively.
8. It is critical that planning recognizes the impacts of climate change and attempts to protect the most vulnerable in our community from harm. For example, allowing development of low-lying waterfront land when we know that sea levels are rising and that we will reach 1m at some point in the coming decades (and go on to 2m after that) will condemn purchasers to loss of their capital. We have to provide a mechanism to allow land to be used for its expected life while those who buy and sell the land can go on with their lives without fear of loss. Climate change is such a new idea for human society that we need new methods of thinking. Perhaps land that has a limited life needs to have a new category as it is no longer 'permanent' as property used to be.
9. Modifying State and Federal land use regulation to allow risk management approaches to climate adaptation by local plans is imperative.
10. It is recommended that a national body be set up to make recommendations on policy and regulation for adaptation to the impacts of climate change. Such a body should coordinate state laws and federal laws to ensure there is a consistent approach across all jurisdictions.
11. You state that "Within limits, there are many reasons to believe these impacts are manageable." Scientists have been calling for major and urgent change to the way we do things for more than 20 years. What have we changed so far? Australia's emissions from fossil fuels has gone up 40% in that 20 years. We are doing no better internationally with China increasing emissions at a staggering rate and India lining up to follow. To suggest that the changes to our climate will be anything less than a tragic comedy where humanity staggers from one disaster to the next is ignoring reality. It is imperative that we put maximum effort into both mitigation and adaptation so that we have a chance of holding our society together. There must be no half efforts in this.
12. In relying on assessments based on the 2007 IPCC report, you are relying on science mostly older than 2005. The science since then shows much more impact than was understood in 2005. It is noted there is some consideration of later papers. However, you will find the latest science is more worrying than you give credit.
13. Social impacts are already occurring on people. For example, waterfront property owners are finding themselves increasingly abandoned and ignored. For all the economic aspects of this problem, there are quite serious cultural impacts as well. Adaptation means increasing the

resilience of the society as well as adapting to the physical impacts and the economic impacts. One of the pressing problems here is the tendency to ignore climate change and sweep the threats under the carpet.

14. The need to go through the grieving process must be understood – coping with the shock can lead to denial and anger (the 5 stages of the grieving process). This must be acknowledged by policy makers and incorporated into the strategy to increase adaptive resilience.

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