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INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to be here at the opening of this Climate Change Adaptation Futures Conference.

A conference that comes at a challenging point in the debate on climate change.

It is timely for us to remind ourselves why we all started talking about climate change and why we called for action.

The reason was the science.

For too long, those who deny climate change is real have muddied the debate.

For too long, they have hijacked this issue to pursue their own agenda.

Today, I want to play my part in setting the record straight on the science.

But first, I want to recognise you and the scientists across the world who are continuing their research on climate change.

It is because of you that we understand climate change is real.

It is because of you that we understand that climate change is happening now.

It is because of you that we understand that climate change is caused by CO₂ emissions.

Nevertheless, there are some academics and commentators who undermine the science.

They differ from those who question, or are unsure, or even those who are simply doubtful of the science.

They are not swayed by evidence. Instead they start from a position of opposition.

Those that deny the reality of climate change – let's call them the climate change opposition - cannot agree on an alternative theory.

And they are even less likely to concede that they might be wrong.

Some say the earth is not warming. Some say it has stopped warming.

Others say the earth is warming – but because of natural variability.

When it comes down to it, the climate change opposition have not put forward one alternative, coherent explanation as to how the climate is changing and why it is changing.

And when weighing their theories it is reasonable to ask about the relevance of their qualifications and the extent of their willingness to be peer reviewed.

Publicity does not equate to scientific weight.

CLIMATE CHANGE SCIENCE

On the other hand, those putting forward the evidence of human-induced climate change are affiliated with some of the most credible research organisations in the world.

In Australia, there's the Bureau of Meteorology and the CSIRO.

In the US, there is the US National Academy of Sciences.

In the UK there's the Hadley Centre.

And finally, there's the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Apart from this, we must acknowledge that the climate change consensus is underpinned by the peer review process.

It is important that the public understands how this system works.

Peer review is the process of allowing science to be reviewed before it is accepted for publication by peers in a field who judge the competence, significance and originality of the research.

These scientists then challenge or support these results with peer-reviewed articles of their own and over time a consensus builds around the observations that explain the science most successfully.

It is robust. It is trustworthy.

I note there have been some issues raised recently about the IPCC.

The most important of the three volumes of the IPCC for policy is the Working Group 1 report, which is the foundation for climate change science.

The authors of that report were very careful to use only peer-reviewed literature and to consider it all carefully.

Furthermore, a recent study in the journal, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, reported that about 98 per cent of the most active publishing climate researchers agree that human activity is warming the planet.

For us, these processes, the evidence and the consensus reaffirms the existence of climate change. It also reaffirms the case for action.

It is clear to you and I why we can trust the science, but it may be less clear to the people who don't follow this closely.

Many people do not have the time to read the thousands of pages that has been written about climate science.

Generally, the information they receive about climate change is from politicians, the media and other sources.

They are told by people like you and me that climate change is real and is from the decades of industrial pollution and the greenhouse gases that continue to be pumped into the atmosphere.

But then some public figures say this is not true.

Unfortunately, not everyone is aware that there is a difference when it comes to the credibility of these contributions.

The climate change opposition pick and choose statistics that seem to back up their claims and present information in an irresponsible way.

Let me give you a recent example.

Newspapers in the UK and Australia published articles criticising the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report.

The articles criticised the IPCC report for stating that:

“ up to 40 per cent of the Amazon rainforest could be sensitive to future changes in rainfall”.

The newspapers said it was an ``**unsubstantiated claim**'' and the headlines included:

``**More flaws emerge in climate alarms**'' and the ``**UN climate panel shamed by bogus rainforest claim**''.

These reports were simply untrue. They were published nevertheless.

Last week the newspapers issued a correction and I acknowledge them for doing the right thing.

However there are many who have not. Just because something is published does not make it right.

It brings me to my next point.

In this day and age we are bombarded with arguments and counter-arguments.

We have all been taught that there are two sides to every story.

The difference is that climate change is not a story. Climate change is fact.

And it is irresponsible to try to tell people that climate change does not pose a risk.

For example, we should remind ourselves that:

- 2009 was the second hottest year in Australia and ended our hottest decade.
- Each decade since the 1940s has been warmer than the past.
- Globally, 2009 was ranked the fifth warmest year on record and capped off the hottest decade in recorded history.
- Sea levels are rising.
- Scientists have found that it is at least 90 per cent likely that the observed global warming has been caused by human activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels and land-use change.

If we do not take action on climate change, the impact on the Murray Darling Basin will be catastrophic.

If emissions continue to grow unabated, irrigated agriculture in the Murray Darling Basin is projected to decline by 90 per cent this century.

To put a local perspective on it, if emissions grow unabated, the CSIRO projects the number of days more than 40C in Queensland will increase rapidly.

For example, within the next six decades - which for some Australians will be in our children's lifetime - the number of hot days over 40C in Longreach will increase from 21 to 59.

And then there are our natural icons such as the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and the Daintree.

Scientists are already warning us that the Great Barrier Reef is being affected by climate change.

If these icons are irreparably damaged, they will no longer be seen through the eyes of the next generation as they were by the last.

Ross Garnaut, the economist who was tasked to do the Government's climate change review, was right when he described climate change as a "diabolical policy problem".

We are asking this generation to make significant changes, so the next generation can enjoy the same quality of life that we have enjoyed.

It means you, me and this Government will always have a duty to responsibly explain the facts of climate change.

This is a challenge because it is hard to reduce complex scientific research into one-line statements.

But we knew this would not be easy.

And it was made harder in the past 12 months because the national Parliament was not up to the job.

The senior federal politicians who believe climate change is "absolute crap" stood in the way of action.

It is important we remember what happened last year because some senior federal politicians are trying to re-write history.

Since coming to Government, we put forward a green paper, a white paper and released the Garnaut Review into climate change.

We put forward our mechanism, the CPRS, and after intense negotiations, the Government struck a deal with the Coalition.

But at one fell swoop, Tony Abbott torpedoed the deal we had with the Opposition.

He put his political interests first and the interests of the nation last.

Nevertheless, we re-introduced the Bill into the Senate and two Liberals crossed the floor to vote with us for a price on carbon.

If the Australian Greens had not teamed up with the Coalition to sink the legislation, we would be moving towards a price on carbon.

It may be history, as they say, but that does not mean we should give up. We have to look forward.

At her first press conference as Labor leader last week, Julia Gillard said:

“It is as disappointing to me as it is to millions of Australians that we do not have a price on carbon.

“And in the future we will need one. But first we will need to establish a community consensus for action.”

The Prime Minister has made clear her commitment to building a lasting and deep community consensus on this issue.

We will build this consensus, despite vocal opponents who will say anything they can to undermine the science.

We ask that you give us your help and expertise.

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING

One of the first steps this Government has taken is to bolster renewable energy and adaptation measures throughout the country.

We must invest in adaptation, which will become much more expensive in the future if we do not put a price on carbon.

But I just want to go back a step.

Our environment has been heavily affected by the years of pollution from heavy industry.

But we should not blame previous generations for the position we are in now.

This great country, and many others across the world, were developed off the back of cheap and reliable energy.

However, generations ago, the science did not unequivocally warn of the dangers of rising CO₂ emissions.

But now it does.

We know this now, and as a result we now we have tough choices to make.

This Government is beginning the transition.

Our Renewable Energy Target passed both Houses of Parliament last week.

It mandates that the equivalent of at least 20 per cent of Australia's electricity supply comes from renewable sources such as wind and solar.

This will help drive nearly \$19 billion of investment in clean, renewable energy.

SUSTAINABLE WATER SUPPLIES

In the water portfolio, we have helped fund key infrastructure for local councils to prepare for climate change.

We allocated \$200m under our Strengthening Basin Communities program to help local communities across the Murray-Darling Basin invest in new water-saving initiatives.

We have announced more than \$86 million in funding for 13 stormwater, harvesting and reuse projects under our National Urban Water and Desalination Plan.

This is all part of our \$1 billion commitment to helping secure water supplies for the current and future needs of our towns and cities - investments that are all about preparing us for climate change.

In Australia we have a history of water scarcity and we know water has been in even more short supply in recent years.

We are investing a great deal in securing water supplies in urban and rural areas.

But an important part of the equation is the relationship between population growth and water scarcity.

Understanding the capacity of our water supplies, and our ability to use water more efficiently, is an important component of sustainable population planning.

ADAPTATION

In February this year I released the Government's position paper on adaptation.

The Commonwealth is developing a national adaptation response agenda in partnership with states and territories for COAG consideration later this year.

It is work that has to be done, especially in light of the Climate Change Risks to Australia's Coasts Report released last year.

This report stated that between 157,000 and 247,000 existing residential buildings would be at risk from sea inundation of 1.1m by the end of the century.

In the face of research such as this – we cannot ignore the need to adapt to the climate change we cannot avoid.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge the work of the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, the CSIRO Adaptation Flagship and many of you for the progress you have made so far, and your commitment to what will need to be done in the future.

You have remained focused on your work in the face of vocal opponents.

Your research continues to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of climate change, and what it means for this nation.

At this time, we should remember again that this debate and the call for action began with the science. And the science can get it back on track again. Because no fair-minded person could be presented with the weight and extent of the science and not conclude that we have to act.

The science is at the heart of building the consensus.

Thank you.