

**Action for Climate Change ~ A Conflict Resolution Perspective**  
**“It’s Not Just About Reducing Emissions... !”**  
***Must the Kyoto History Repeat?***

**Dr Ted Christie, 14 August 2024**



**Disclosure Statement**

*Ted Christie does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations*

In a recent [\*\*interview with Sky News Australia \(14 July 2024\)\*\*](#) ahead of The Australian newspaper’s 60th anniversary, *News Corp and Fox Corporation Emeritus Chairman, Rupert Murdoch*, widened the climate change-environment debate as well as on Australia’s approach for achieving net zero.

Rupert Murdoch was asked the following question: -

“Do you think the net zero targets are achievable and can Australia, and other first world countries, get the balance right between concerns for the environment and climate and maintaining a competitive economy and affordable energy?”

- *In response to this question: “I think we’re absolutely on the wrong track”;*
- *That “I’m not a climate denier. I might be a sceptic of some of the things that are said. But you’re going to have blackouts... the cost of living will go up all over the world.”*
- *He said he believes there are other solutions besides renewables, such as to abolish coal and to focus on natural gas “which is cheap and clean”.*
- *“In Australia, we’re throwing away gas. I just think we’re damaging ourselves competitively and foolishly.”*

The Sky News Australia question, and the response by Rupert Murdoch, resonates with public debate on climate and energy issues.

Concern and controversy exist over the pathway to net zero:

In particular, whether the focus of Australia's plan to reduce emissions

is on a collision course with adverse socio-economic impacts, including: -

- *Energy security in terms of a predictable and dispatchable power system*
- *Significant increases in power costs for the manufacturing sector and the community*
- *Job losses in regional Australia*
- *An increase in the cost of living*
- *Possible closure of mines and flow on effect on the regional, State and national economy*
- *Reductions in overseas exports and Australia's food security*
- *Adverse impacts on international competitiveness*

**COMMENT: *The focus on action to reduce emissions must be counter-balanced with an assessment of the potential adverse environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts, at the regional, national, and global level in order for the impacts to be managed to an acceptable level of risk.***

The cornerstone of a problem-solving pathway for going forward to address these concerns - as well as for resolving the issues identified by Rupert Murdoch in the Sky News Australia interview - exists: -

*By ensuring that action for climate change  
and emissions reduction is recognized  
as a "classic sustainable development problem" to resolve.*

### ***What is the connection between sustainability and action for climate change?***

The link commenced with the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992)* and the general obligation it prescribed: "*The Parties have a right to, and should, promote sustainable development.*"

The *Kyoto Protocol (1998)* followed, prescribing a specific obligation for emission reductions: "*In order to promote sustainable development*".

An aim of the *Paris Agreement (2015)* was to enhance implementation of the Convention, including its objective “to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development.”

### ***The Origin of the Concept of Sustainable Development***

The release of “**Our Common Future**” by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 (the “Brundtland Report”), and its subsequent acceptance by the UN General Assembly introduced the concept of sustainable development.

Next, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Brazil (1992) and its two texts: the “**Rio Declaration on Environment and Development**” - which set out principles to guide decision-making on sustainable development; and “**Agenda 21**” - a future global plan of action for sustainable development.

At the global level, “**Climate Action**” is one of the core Goals of the historic “**UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**”: Sustainable Development Goal (“SDG”) 13.

Achieving SDG13 is guided by the Target which requires climate change action measures to be integrated into national plans, policies, and strategies.

***The significance of the  
UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development  
and the Paris Agreement is that, together,  
they reinforce the interdependence and mutual support  
between action for climate change and sustainable development.***

***How can the linkage between sustainable development  
and emission reduction targets best be achieved?***

By recognizing that the *Paris Agreement* is a landmark Agreement in that it is a **legally binding international treaty on climate change** for all 196 UN Parties that ratified it. Paris provides an equal opportunity for all nations: -

**"For the first time, a binding climate Agreement brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects"** (Author's emphasis).

- Ideally, a National Plan to reduce emissions should be consistent with the following **UNFCCC statement**: -  
"The ultimate objective of all Agreements under the UNFCCC is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system, in a time frame which allows ecosystems to adapt naturally and enables sustainable development."
- Today, the challenge for each UN Party becomes one of deciding on an appropriate National Plan for transitioning to net zero that complies with the binding *Paris Agreement* obligation and the *UN 2030 Agenda SDG13* for sustainable development.
- A sustainable solution for achieving net zero requires the multiple objectives - *environmental, economic, and social (including cultural)* - to be objectively evaluated, weighted equally, and balanced fairly. A sustainable solution would aim to resolve today's concerns about the balance between the environment and climate and maintaining a competitive economy and affordable energy!
- A sustainable solution should not focus inordinately any one objective e.g. as such was the case for the *Kyoto Protocol's*<sup>1</sup> focus on economics and the *Emissions Trading System* (the "ETS").

***What action has Australia taken to reduce emissions, under the climate change Agreements, to facilitate decision-making on sustainable development?***

Following the UN endorsement of "*Our Common Future (1987)*", and the "*Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992)*" coming into force, ***action taken by the then Federal Government in Australia***, from 1987 was to draft, review, then to introduce a unique environmental Policy in 1992: The ***National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development***.

This environmental Policy set out Guiding Principles to guide decision-making on sustainable development and for *"developing ways of using those environmental resources which form the basis of [Australia's] economy in a way that maintains and, where possible, improves their range, variety, and quality"*.

Inter-generational equity was one of the Core Objectives of the Policy.

***COMMENT: The significance of the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development, for conflict resolution, is that its six Guiding Principles provide objective criteria for effectively evaluating a National Plan for reducing emissions "in the context of sustainable development."***

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

- 1. Decision making processes should effectively integrate both long and short term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations .***
- 2. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation. The global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies should be recognised and considered.***
- 3. The need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy which can enhance the capacity for environmental protection should be recognised.***
- 4. The need to maintain and enhance international competitiveness in an environmentally sound manner should be recognised.***
- 5. Cost effective and flexible policy instruments should be adopted, such as improved valuation, pricing and incentive mechanisms.***
- 6. Decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues which affect them.***

There are now opportunities for Australia, today, to pursue to be seen as an influential UN Party on climate and energy issues by implementing a sustainable solution for its National Plan in transitioning to net zero.

## **CONCLUSIONS:**

**1.0 The linkage between the Paris Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reinforces the interdependence and mutual support between action for climate change, emissions reduction and sustainable development.**

**2.0 The aim of a sustainable solution: To get the balance right between emission reduction targets and concerns for the environment and climate, maintaining a competitive economy and affordable energy, is paramount.**

**3.0 The Guiding Principles of the Australian Policy, the “National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development”, are presented as objective criteria to evaluate national Plans for transitioning to net zero “in the context of sustainable development.”**

**The Guiding Principles, in this regard, enable one of the long-standing and accepted elements for conflict resolution, “To insist that agreement be based on objective criteria”, be applied to facilitate decision-making in transitioning to net zero.**

**4.0 Each UN Party, in signing and ratifying the Paris Agreement, has done so believing that it is in their nation’s best interest to take appropriate national action to address the global problem of climate change.**

**It is now time to promote wider debate and review by UN Parties at COP29, Baku for evaluating pathways for transitioning to net zero “in the context of sustainable development.”**

**5.0 For a time, during the Hawke-Keating [Prime Ministerial] era, Australia had a prominent role in promoting Agenda 21 of the “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” following the introduction of its innovative national environmental policy for sustainable development in 1992.**

**There are now similar opportunities for Australia  
to be seen as an influential UN Party on climate and energy issues  
by implementing a sustainable solution  
for transitioning to net zero.**

**KEY WORDS:** Net zero; emissions; Paris Agreement; SDG13; energy security; environment; sustainable development; Policy; Guiding Principles; objective criteria; risk; COP29 Baku; conflict resolution

## END NOTES

---

- <sup>1</sup> Although the Kyoto Protocol met with limited success, it still should be seen as a significant milestone as a catalyst for effective future global action to slow climate change.
- From the time the Kyoto Protocol came into force in 2005, action for climate change was primarily seen as an economic problem to resolve.
- Under the *Emissions Trading System* - the predominant mechanism for reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – the *Social Cost of Carbon* (“SCC”) to meet the 5% Kyoto emission reduction target, was around \$21 for each tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- However, *around 2011 a warning emerged that a SCC of \$21 “omits many of the biggest risks associated with climate change and downplays the impact of our current emissions on future generations... the SCC could be much higher. In our worst case, it could be almost \$900”* [Other studies reviewed, varied, and required spending up to \$150 to \$500 for each tonne of reductions in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2050].

*COMMENT: Concern over reliance on CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions under Kyoto ultimately galvanized global debate whether the “ETS/economic solution” pathway was cost-effective and politically achievable for substantially changing carbon usage?*

*If emission reduction targets and energy security had been considered in the context of sustainable development from the outset of Kyoto, it may not have taken over a decade to recognize energy security and sustainable development were inter-dependent and mutually supporting; and so, become the cornerstone for a pathway for transitioning to net zero.*

*The Kyoto history would not repeat if sustainable development became the cornerstone for transitioning to net zero:*

*Sustainable development is an “approach to social, economic, and environmental planning that attempts to balance the social and economic needs of present and future human generations with the imperative of preserving, or preventing undue damage to, the natural environment”.*